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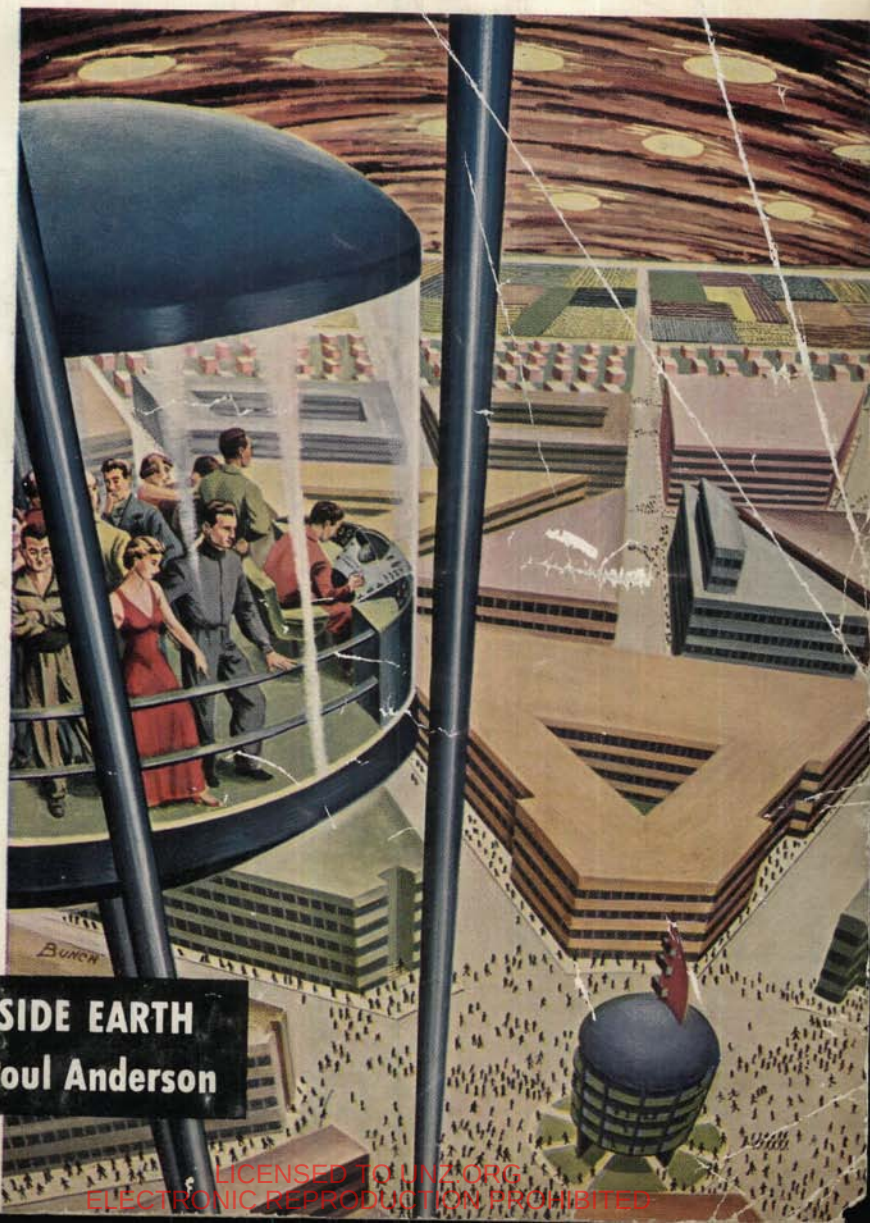

INSIDE EARTH
By Poul Anderson

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Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

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Next issue at your newsstand first week in April

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Treasurer's Report

WITH this issue, we face the unfortunate fact that holding price lines is the responsibility of an entire economy and not just its individual entrepreneurs.

GALAXY, like all business enterprises, and, in fact, all citizens, finds itself caught in an alarming tidal flood of rising costs. The problem can be solved in only one of two ways:

• Cut expenses proportionately. In the case of GALAXY, that would mean reducing story rates, lowering the quality of cover and inside paper stock, going back to line engraving instead of the more costly halftone process, making it merely another science fiction magazine.

• Raise the price proportionately. This would allow us to retain *all* our features and continue to improve from issue to issue.

Since it is impossible to get a readers' vote in time to cope with the immediate situation, we have chosen to raise the price, rather than compromise on quality.

This is *not*, however, an inflexible decision. If your letters and our circulation figures show that you do not approve of this choice, we will change it.

My own reluctance to tamper with quality is based partly on the contents of this issue, mostly on the excellent items coming up soon, and still more innovations planned.

The present one introduces the policy of an issue of complete stories between serials. Of the six items, *at least* three probably will be selected for book publication—this has been the average for the previous issues of GALAXY, and bids are still coming in!

What would please us particularly would be the reprinting of every story in every issue; the publicity would be good for GALAXY and the additional income good for the writers. But that isn't likely. There isn't room enough for the number of anthologies needed to absorb the 60 or so stories we print a year.

In the matter of novels, the picture is entirely different. Every book-length we have bought or contracted for has been signed for hard-cover publication.

Next month's is *Mars Child* by Cyril Judd, three of the most compellingly convincing installments science fiction has ever produced. Cyril Judd, by the way, is the joint name of C. M. Kornbluth and Judith Merril and was chosen only for wieldiness, not secrecy.

The cover is another superb Bonestell, reproduced magnificently on our splendid and very expensive Kromekote cover stock.

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—H. L. GOLD

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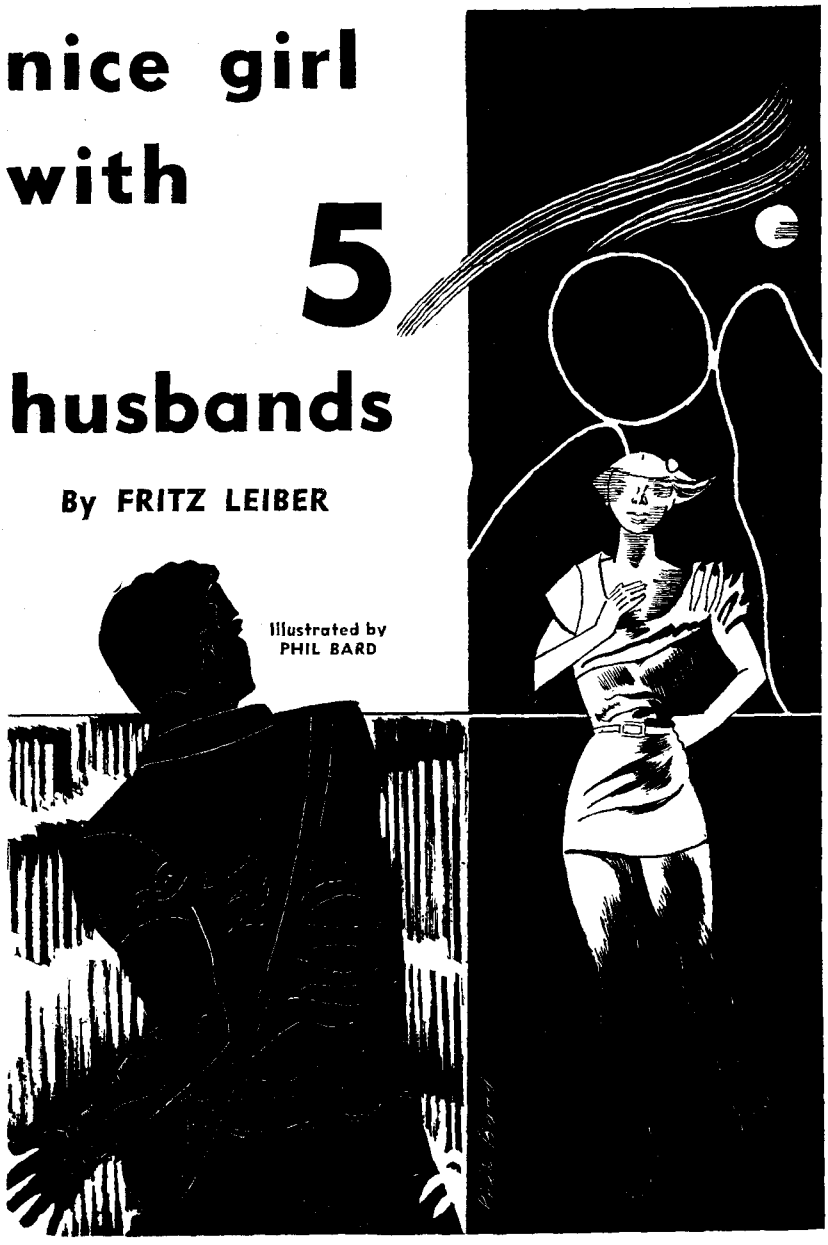
nice girl with 5 husbands

By FRITZ LEIBER

Illustrated by PHIL BARD



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Adventure is relative to one's previous experience. Sometimes, in fact, you can't even be sure you're having or not having one!

TO BE given paid-up leisure and find yourself unable to create is unpleasant for any artist. To be stranded in a cluster of desert cabins with a dozen lonely people in the same predicament only makes it worse. So Tom Dorset was understandably irked with himself and the Tosker-Brown Vacation Fellowships as he climbed with the sun into the valley of red stones. He accepted the chafing of his camera strap against his shoulder as the nagging of conscience. He agreed with the disparaging hisses of the grains of sand rutched by his sneakers, and he wished that the occasional breezes, which faintly echoed the same criticisms, could blow *him* into a friendlier, less jealous age.

He had no way of knowing that just as there are winds that blow through space, so there are winds that blow through time. Such winds may be strong or weak. The strong ones are rare and seldom blow for short distances, or more of us would know about them. What they pick up is almost always whirled far into the future or past.

This has happened to people. There was Ambrose Bierce, who walked out of America and existence, and there are thousands of others who have disappeared without a trace, though many of these may not have been caught up by time tornadoes and I do not know if a time gale blew across the deck of the *Marie Celeste.*

Sometimes a time wind is playful, snatching up an object, sporting with it for a season and then returning it unharmed to its original place. Sometimes we may be blown about by whimsical time winds without realizing it. Memory, for example, is a tiny time breeze, so weak that it can ripple only the mind.

A very few time winds are like the monsoon, blowing at fixed intervals, first in one direction, then the other. Such a time wind blows near a balancing rock in a valley of red stones in the American Southwest. Every morning at ten o'clock, it blows a hundred years into the future; every afternoon at two, it blows a hundred years into the past.

Quite a number of people have unwittingly seen time winds in operation. There are misty spots on the sea's horizon and wavery patches over desert sands. There

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are mirages and will o' the wisps and ice blinks. And there are dust devils, such as Tom Dorset walked into near the balancing rock.

It seemed to him no more than a spiteful upgust of sand, against which he closed his eyes until the warm granules stopped peppering the lids. He opened them to see the balancing rock had silently fallen and lay a quarter buried—no, that couldn't be, he told himself instantly. He had been preoccupied; he must have passed the balancing rock and held its image in his mind.

DESPITE this rationalization he was quite shaken. The strap of his camera slipped slowly down his arm without his feeling it. And just then there stepped around the giant bobbin of the rock an extraordinarily pretty girl with hair the same pinkish copper color.

She was barefoot and wearing a pale blue playsuit rather like a Grecian tunic. But most important, as she stood there toeing his rough shadow in the sand, there was a complete naturalness about her, an absence of sharp edges, as if her personality had weathered without aging, just as the valley seemed to have taken another step toward eternity in the space of an instant.

She must have assumed something of the same gentleness in him, for her faint surprise faded and she asked him, as easily as if he were a friend of five years' standing, "Tell now, do you think a woman can love just one man? All her life? And a man just one woman?"

Tom Dorset made a dazed sound.

His mind searched wildly.

"I do," she said, looking at him as calmly as at a mountain. "I think a man and woman can be each other's world, like Tristan and Isolde or Frederic and Catherine. Those old authors were wise. I don't see why on earth a girl has to spread her love around, no matter how enriching the experiences may be."

"You know, I agree with you," Tom said, thinking he'd caught her idea—it was impossible not to catch her casualness. "I think there's something cheap about the way everybody's supposed to run after sex these days."

"I don't mean that exactly. Tenderness is beautiful, but—" She pouted. "A big family can be vastly crushing. I wanted to declare today a holiday, but they outvoted me. Jock said it didn't chime with our mood cycles. But I was angry with them, so I put on my clothes—"

"Put on—?"

"To make it a holiday," she explained bafflingly. "And I walked here for a tantrum." She stepped out of Tom's shadow and hopped back. "Ow, the sand's getting hot," she said, rubbing the grains from the pale and uncramped toes.

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"You go barefoot a lot?" Tom guessed.

"No, mostly digitals," she replied and took something shimmering from a pocket at her hip and drew it on her foot. It was a high-ankled, transparent mocassin with five separate toes. She zipped it shut with the speed of a card trick, then similarly gloved the other foot. Again the metal-edged slit down the front seemed to close itself.

"I'm behind on the fashions," Tom said, curious. They were walking side by side now, the way she'd come and he'd been going. "How does that zipper work?"

"Magnetic. They're on all my clothes. Very simple." She parted her tunic to the waist, then let it zip together.

"Clever," Tom remarked with a gulp. There seemed no limits to this girl's naturalness.

"I see you're a button man," she said. "You actually believe it's possible for a man and woman to love just each other?"

HIS chuckle was bitter. He was thinking of Elinore Murphy at Tosker-Brown and a bit about cold-faced Miss Tosker herself. "I sometimes wonder if it's possible for anyone to love anyone."

"You haven't met the right girls," she said.

"Girl," he corrected.

She grinned at him. "You'll make me think you really are a monogamist. What group do you come from?"

"Let's not talk about that," he requested. He was willing to forego knowing how she'd guessed he was from an art group, if he could be spared talking about the Vacation Fellowships and those nervous little cabins.

"My group's very nice on the whole," the girl said, "but at times they can be nefandously exasperating. Jock's the worst, quietly guiding the rest of us like an analyst. How I loathe that man! But Larry's almost as bad, with his shame-faced bumptiousness, as if we'd all sneaked off on a joyride to Venus. And there's Jokichi at the opposite extreme, forever scared he won't distribute his affection equally, dividing it up into mean little packets like candy for jealous children who would scream if they got one chewy less. And then there's Sasha and Ernest—"

"Who are you talking about?" Tom asked.

"My husbands." She shook her head dolefully. "To find five more difficult men would be positively Martian."

Tom's mind backtracked frantically, searching all conversations at Tosker-Brown for gossip about cultists in the neighborhood. It found nothing and embarked on a wider search. There were the Mormons (was that the word that had sounded like Martian?) but it wasn't the Mormon husbands who

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were plural. And then there was Oneida (weren't husbands and wives both plural there?) but that was 19th century New England.

"Five husbands?" he repeated. She nodded. He went on, "Do you mean to say five men have got you alone somewhere up here?"

"To be sure not," she replied. "There are my kwives."

"Kwives?"

"Co-wives," she said more slowly. "They can be fascinerously exasperating, too."

TOM'S mind did some more searching. "And yet you believe in monogamy?"

She smiled. "Only when I'm having tantrums. It was civilized of you to agree with me."

"But I actually do believe in monogamy," he protested.

She gave his hand a little squeeze. "You are nice, but let's rush now. I've finished my tantrum and I want you to meet my group. You can fresh yourself with us."

As they hurried across the heated sands, Tom Dorset felt for the first time a twinge of uneasiness. There was something about this girl, more than her strange clothes and the odd words she used now and then, something almost—though ghosts don't wear digitals—spectral.

They scrambled up a little rise, digging their footgear into the sand, until they stood on a long flat. And there, serpentining around two great clumps of rock, was a many-windowed adobe ranch house with a roof like fresh soot.

"Oh, they've put on their clothes," his companion exclaimed with pleasure. "They've decided to make it a holiday after all."

Tom spotted a beard in the group swarming out to meet them. Its cultish look gave him a momentary feeling of superiority, followed by an equally momentary apprehension—the five husbands were certainly husky. Then both feelings were swallowed up in the swirl of introduction.

He told his own name, found that his companion's was Lois Wolver, then smiling faces began to bob toward his, his hands were shaken, his cheeks were kissed, he was even spun around like blind man's buff, so that he lost track of the husbands and failed to attach Mary, Rachel, Simone and Joyce to the right owners.

He did notice that Jokichi was an Oriental with a skin as tight as enameled china, and that Rachel was a tall slim Negro girl. Also someone said, "Joyce isn't a Wolver, she's just visiting."

He got a much clearer impression of the clothes than the names. They were colorful, costly-looking, and mostly Egyptian and Cretan in inspiration. Some of them would have been quite immodest, even compared to Miss Tosker's famous playsuits, except that the wearers didn't seem to feel so.

"There goes the middle-morning

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rocket!" one of them eagerly cried.

Tom looked up with the rest, but his eyes caught the dazzling sun. However, he heard a faint roaring that quickly sank in volume and pitch, and it reminded him that the Army had a rocket testing range in this area. He had little interest in science, but he hadn't known they were on a daily schedule.

"Do you suppose it's off the track?" he asked anxiously.

"Not a chance," someone told him—the beard, he thought. The assurance of the tones gave him a possible solution. Scientists came from all over the world these days and might have all sorts of advanced ideas. This could be a group working at a nearby atomic project and leading its peculiar private life on the side.

AS THEY eddied toward the house he heard Lois remind someone, "But you finally did declare it a holiday," and a husband who looked like a gay pharaoh respond, "I had another see at the mood charts and I found a subtle surge I'd missed."

Meanwhile the beard (a black one) had taken Tom in charge. Tom wasn't sure of his name, but he had a tan skin, a green sarong, and a fiercely jovial expression. "The swimming pool's around there, the landing spot's on the other side," he began, then noticed Tom gazing at the sooty roof. "Sun power cells," he explained proudly. "They store all the current we need."

Tom felt his idea confirmed. "Wonder you don't use atomic power," he observed lightly.

The beard nodded. "We've been asked that. Matter of esthetics. Why waste sunlight or use hard radiations needlessly? Of course, you might feel differently. What's your group, did you say?"

"Tosker-Brown," Tom told him, adding when the beard frowned, "the Fellowship people, you know."

"I don't," the beard confessed. "Where are you located?"

Tom briefly described the ranch house and cabins at the other end of the valley.

"Comic, I can't place it." The beard shrugged. "Here come the children."

A dozen naked youngsters raced around the ranch house, followed by a woman in a vaguely African dress open down the sides.

"Yours?" Tom asked.

"Ours," the beard answered.

"C'est un homme!"

"Regardez des vêtements!"

"No need to practice, kids; this is a holiday," the beard told them. "Tom, Helen," he said, introducing the woman with the air-conditioned garment. "Her turn today to companion die Kinder."

One of the latter rapped on the beard's knee. "May we show the stranger our things?" Instantly the others joined in pleading. The

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beard shot an inquiring glance at Tom, who nodded. A moment later the small troupe was hurrying him toward a spacious lean-to at the end of the ranch house. It was chuckful of strange toys, rocks and plants, small animals in cages and out, and the oddest model airplanes, or submarines. But Tom was given no time to look at any one thing for long.

"See my crystals? I grew them."

"Smell my mutated gardenias. Tell now, isn't there a difference?" There didn't seem to be, but he nodded.

"Look at my squabbits." This referred to some long-eared white squirrels nibbling carrots and nuts.

"Here's my newest model spaceship, a DS-57-B. Notice the detail." The oldest boy shoved one of the submarine affairs in his face.

TOM felt like a figure that is being tugged about in a rococo painting by wide pink ribbons in the chubby hands of naked cherubs. Except that these cherubs were slim and tanned, fantastically energetic, and apparently of depressingly high IQ. (What these scientists did to children!) He missed Lois and was grateful for the single little girl solemnly skipping rope in a corner and paying no attention to him.

The odd lingo she repeated stuck in his mind: "Gik-lo, I-o, Rik-o, Gis-so. Gik-lo, I-o . . ."

Suddenly the air was filled with soft chimes. "Lunch," the children shouted and ran away.

Tom followed at a soberer pace along the wall of the ranch house. He glanced in the huge windows, curious about the living and sleeping arrangements of the Wolvers, but the panes were strangely darkened. Then he entered the wide doorway through which the children had scampered and his curiosity turned to wonder.

A resilient green floor that wasn't flat, but sloped up toward the white of the far wall like a breaking wave. Chairs like giants' hands tenderly cupped. Little tables growing like mushrooms and broad-leafed plants out of the green floor. A vast picture window showing the red rocks.

Yet it was the wood-paneled walls that electrified his artistic interest. They blossomed with fruits and flowers, deep and poignantly carved in several styles. He had never seen such work.

He became aware of a silence and realized that his hosts and hostesses were smiling at him from around a long table. Moved by a sudden humility, he knelt and unlaced his sneakers and added them to the pile of sandals and digitals by the door. As he rose, a soft and comic piping started and he realized that beyond the table the children were lined up, solemnly puffing at little wooden flutes and recorders. He saw the empty chair at the table and went toward it,

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conscious for the moment of nothing but his dusty feet.

He was disappointed that Lois wasn't sitting next to him, but the food reminded him that he was hungry. There was a charming little steak, striped black and brown with perfection, and all sorts of vege-

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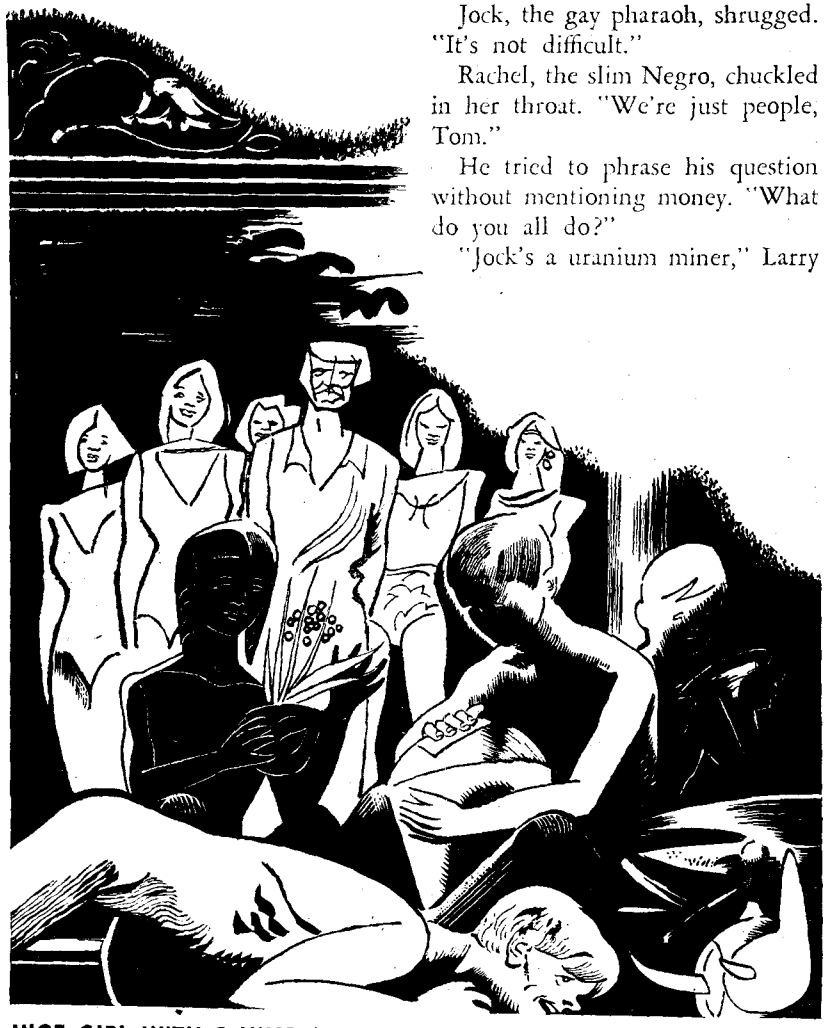
tables and fruits, one or two of which he didn't recognize.

"Flown from Africa," someone explained to him.



These sly scientists, he thought, living behind their security curtain in the most improbable world!

When they were sitting with coffee and wine, and the children had finished their concert and were busy at another table, he asked, "How do you manage all this?"

Jock, the gay pharaoh, shrugged. "It's not difficult."

Rachel, the slim Negro, chuckled in her throat. "We're just people, Tom."

He tried to phrase his question without mentioning money. "What do you all do?"

"Jock's a uranium miner," Larry

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(the beard) answered, briskly taking over. "Rachel's an algae farmer. I'm a rocket pilot. Lois—"

ALTHOUGH pleased at this final confirmation of his guess, Tom couldn't help feeling a surge of uneasiness. "Sure you should be telling me these things?"

Larry laughed. "Why not? Lois and Jokichi have been exchange-workers in China the last six months."

"Mostly digging ditches," Jokichi put in with a smile.

"—and Sasha's in an assembly plant. Helen's a psychiatrist. Oh, we just do ordinary things. Now we're on grand vacation."

"Grand vacation?"

"When all of us have a vacation together," Larry explained. "What do you do?"

"I'm an artist," Tom said, taking out a cigaret.

"But what else?" Larry asked.

Tom felt an angry embarrassment. "Just an artist," he mumbled, cigaret in mouth, digging in his pockets for a match.

"Hold on," said Joyce beside him and pointed a silver pencil at the tip of the cigaret. He felt a faint thrill in his lips and then started back, coughing. The cigaret was lighted.

"Please mutate my poppy seeds, Mommy." A little girl had darted to Joyce from the children's table.

"You're a very dirty little girl," Joyce told her without reproof. "Hold them out." She briefly directed the silver pencil at the clay pellets on the grimy little palm. The little girl shivered delightedly. "I love ultrasonics, they feel so funny." She scampered off.

Tom cleared his throat. "I must say I'm tremendously impressed with the wood carvings. I'd like to photograph them. Oh, Lord!"

"What's the matter?" Rachel asked.

"I lost my camera somewhere."

"Camera?" Jokichi showed interest. "You mean one for stills?"

"Yes."

"What kind?"

"A Leica," Tom told him.

Jokichi seemed impressed. "That is interesting. I've never seen one of those old ones."

"Tom's a button man," Lois remarked by way of explanation, apparently. "Was the camera in a brown case? You dropped it where we met. We can get it later."

"Good, I'd really like to take those pictures," Tom said. "Incidentally, who did the carvings?"

"We did," Jock said. "Together."

Tom was grateful that the scamper of the children out of the room saved him from having to reply. He couldn't think of anything but a grunt of astonishment.

The conversation split into a group of chats about something called a psych machine, trips to Russia, the planet Mars, and sev-

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eral artists Tom had never heard of. He wanted to talk to Lois, but she was one of the group gabbling about Mars like children. He felt suddenly uneasy and out of things, and neither Rachel's deprecating remarks about her section of the wood carvings nor Joyce's interesting smiles helped much. He was glad when they all began to get up. He wandered outside and made his way to the childrens' lean-to, feeling very depressed.

ONCE again he was the center of a friendly naked cluster, except for the same solemn-faced little girl skipping rope. A rather malicious but not very hopeful whim prompted him to ask the youngest, "What's one and one?"

"Ten," the shaver answered glibly. Tom felt pleased.

"It could also be two," the oldest boy remarked.

"I'll say," Tom agreed. "What's the population of the world?"

"About seven hundred million."

Tom nodded noncommittally and, grabbing at the first long word that he thought of, turned to the eldest girl. "What's poliomyelitis?"

"Never heard of it," she said.

The solemn little girl kept droning the same ridiculous chant: "Gik-lo, I-o, Rik-o, Gis-so."

His ego eased, Tom went outside and there was Lois.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said.

She took his hand. "Have we pushed ourselves at you too much? Has our jabbering bothered you? We're a loud-mouthed family and I didn't think to ask if you were loning."

"Loning?"

"Solituding."

"In a way," he said. They didn't speak for a moment. Then, "Are you happy, Lois, in your life here?" he asked.

Her smile was instant. "Of course. Don't you like my group?"

He hesitated. "They make me feel rather no good," he said, and then admitted, "but in a way I'm more attracted to them than any people I've ever met."

"You are?" Her grip on his hand tightened. "Then why don't you stay with us for a while? I like you. It's too early to propose anything, but I think you have a quality our group lacks. You could see how you fit in. And there's Joyce. She's just visiting, too. You wouldn't have to lone unless you wanted."

Before he could think, there was a rhythmic rush of feet and the Wolvers were around them.

"We're swimming," Simone announced.

Lois looked at Tom inquiringly. He smiled his willingness, started to mention he didn't have trunks, then realized that wouldn't be news here. He wondered whether he would blush.

Jock fell in beside him as they

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rounded the ranch house. "Larry's been telling me about your group at the other end of the valley. It's comic, but I've whirled down the valley a dozen times and never spotted any sort of place there. What's it like?"

"A ranch house and several cabins."

JOCK frowned. "Comic I never saw it." His face cleared. "How about whirling over there? You could point it out to me."

"It's really there," Tom said uneasily. "I'm not making it up."

"Of course," Jock assured him. "It was just an idea."

"We could pick up your camera on the way," Lois put in.

The rest of the group had turned back from the huge oval pool and the dark blue and flashing thing beyond it, and stood gay-colored against the pool's pale blue shimmer.

"How about it?" Jock asked them. "A whirl before we bathe?"

Two or three said yes besides Lois, and Jock led the way toward the helicopter that Tom now saw standing beyond the pool, its beetle body as blue as a scarab, its vanes flashing silver.

The others piled in. Tom followed as casually as he could, trying to suppress the pounding of his heart. "Wonder you don't go by rocket," he remarked lightly.

Jock laughed. "For such a short trip?"

The vanes began to thrum. Tom sat stiffly, gripping the sides of the seat, then realized that the others had sunk back lazily in the cushions. There was a moment of strain and they were falling ahead and up. Looking out the side, Tom saw for a moment the sooty roof of the ranch house and the blue of the pool and the pinkish umber of tanned bodies. Then the helicopter lurched gently around. Without warning a miserable uneasiness gripped him, a desire to cling mixed with an urge to escape. He tried to convince himself it was fear of the height.

He heard Lois tell Jock, "That's the place, down by that rock that looks like a wrecked spaceship."

The helicopter began to fall forward. Tom felt Lois' hand on his.

"You haven't answered my question," she said.

"What?" he asked dully.

"Whether you'll stay with us. At least for a while."

He looked at her. Her smile was a comfort. He said, "If I possibly can."

"What could possibly stop you?"

"I don't know," he answered abstractedly.

"You're strange," Lois told him. "There's a weight of sadness in you. As if you lived in a less happy age. As if it weren't 2050."

"Twenty?" he repeated, awakening from his thoughts with a jerk. "What's the time?" he asked anxiously.

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"Two," Jock said. The word sounded like a knell.

"You need cheering," Lois announced firmly.

Amid a whoosh of air rebounding from earth, they jounced gently down. Lois vaulted out. "Come on," she said.

Tom followed her. "Where?" he asked stupidly, looking around at the red rocks through the settling sand cloud stirred by the vanes.

"Your camera," she told him, laughing. "Over there. Come on, I'll race you."

He started to run with her and then his uneasiness got beyond his control. He ran faster and faster. He saw Lois catch her foot on a rock and go down sprawling, but he couldn't stop. He ran desperately around the rock and into a gust of up-whirling sand that terrified him with its suddenness. He tried to escape from the stinging, blinding gust, but there was the nightmarish fright that his wild strides were carrying him nowhere.

Then the sand settled. He stopped running and looked around him. He was standing by the balancing rock. He was gasping. At his feet the rusty brown leather of the camera case peeped from the sand. Lois was nowhere in sight. Neither was the helicopter. The valley seemed different, rawer—one might almost have said younger.

Hours after dark he trailed into Tosker-Brown. Curtained lights still glowed from a few cabins. He was footsore, bewildered, frightened. All afternoon and through the twilight and into the moonlit evening that turned the red rocks black, he had searched the valley. Nowhere had he been able to find the soot-roofed ranch house of the Wolvers. He hadn't even been able to locate the rock like a giant bobbin where he'd met Lois.

During the next days he often returned to the valley. But he never found anything. And he never happened to be near the balancing rock when the time winds blew at ten and two, though once or twice he did see dust devils. Then he went away and eventually forgot.

In his casual reading he ran across popular science articles describing the binary system of numbers used in electronic calculating machines, where one and one make ten. He always skipped them. And more than once he saw the four equations expressing Einstein's generalized theory of gravitation:

$$G_{ik} - \frac{1}{2} g_{ik} R = -\kappa T_{ik}$$

He never connected them with the little girl's chant: "Gik-lo, I-o, Rik-o, Gis-so."

—FRITZ LEIBER

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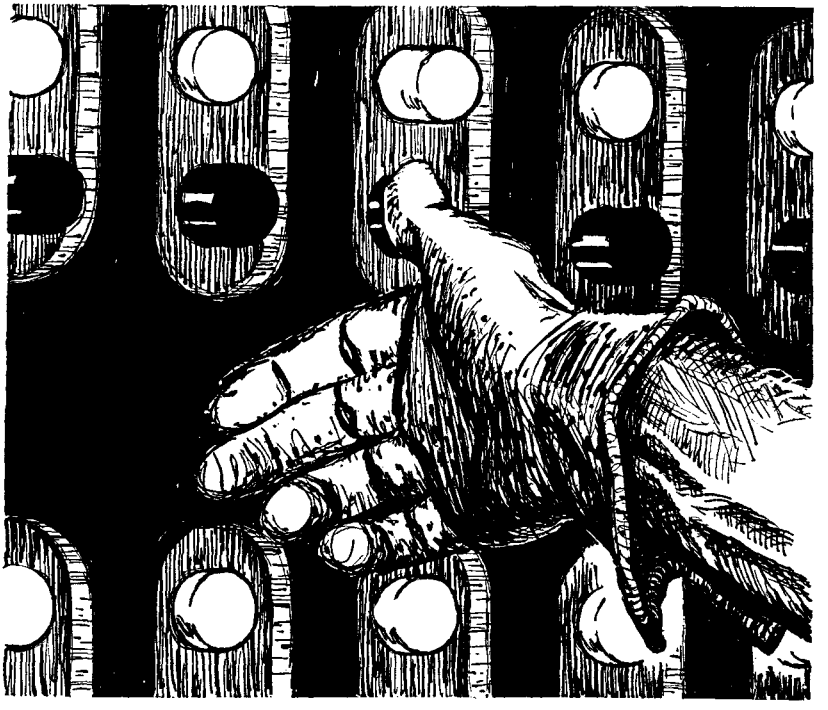
INSIDE EARTH



By POUL ANDERSON

Obviously, no conqueror wants his subjects to revolt against his rule. Obviously? This one would go to any lengths to start a rebellion!

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Illustrated by DAVID STONE

I

THE biotechnicians had been very thorough. I was already a little undersized, which meant that my height and build were suitable—I could pass for a big Earthling. And of course my face and hands and so on were all right, the Earthlings being a remarkably humanoid race. But the technicians had had to remodel my

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ears, blunting the tips and grafting on lobes and cutting the muscles that move them. My crest had to go and a scalp covered with revolting hair was now on the top of my skull.

Finally, and most difficult, there had been the matter of skin color. It just wasn't possible to eliminate my natural coppery pigmentation. So they had injected a substance akin to melanin, together with a virus which would manufacture it in my body, the result being a leathery brown. I could pass for a member of the so-called "white" subspecies, one who had spent most of his life in the open.

The mimicry was perfect. I hardly recognized the creature that looked out of the mirror. My lean, square, blunt-nosed face, gray eyes, and big hands were the same or nearly so. But my black crest had been replaced with a shock of blond hair, my ears were small and immobile, my skin a dull bronze, and several of Earth's languages were hypnotically implanted in my brain —together with a set of habits and reflexes making up a pseudo-personality which should be immune to any tests that the rebels could think of.

I *was* Earthling! And the disguise was self-perpetuating: the hair grew and the skin color was kept permanent by the artificial "disease." The biotechnicians had told me that if I kept the disguise long enough, till I began to age—say, in a century or so—the hair would actually thin and turn white as it did with the natives.

It was reassuring to think that once my job was over, I could be restored to normal. It would need another series of operations and as much time as the original transformation, but it would be as complete and scarless. I'd be human again.

I put on the clothes they had furnished me, typical Earthly garments—rough trousers and shirt of bleached plant fibers, jacket and heavy shoes of animal skin, a battered old hat of matted fur known as felt. There were objects in my pockets, the usual money and papers, a claspknife, the pipe and tobacco I had trained myself to smoke and even to like. It all fitted into my character of a wandering, outdoors sort of man, an educated atavist.

I went out of the hospital with the long swinging stride of one accustomed to walking great distances.

THE Center was busy around me. Behind me, the hospital and laboratories occupied a fairly small building, some eighty stories of stone and steel and plastic. On either side loomed the great warehouses, military barracks, officers' apartments, civilian concessions, filled with the vigorous life of the starways. Behind the monstrous wall, a mile to my right, was the

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spaceport, and I knew that a troopship had just lately dropped gravs from Valgolia herself.

The Center swarmed with young recruits off duty, gaping at the sights, swaggering in their new uniforms. Their skins shone like polished copper in the blistering sunlight, and their crests were beginning to wilt a little. All Earth is not the tropical jungle most Valgolians think it is—northern Europe is very pleasant, and Greenland is even a little on the cold side—but it gets hot enough at North America Center in midsummer to fry a shilast.

A cosmopolitan throng filled the walkways. Soldiers predominated—huge, shy Dacors, little slant-eyed Yangtusans, brawling Gorrads, all the manhood of Valgolia. Then there were other races, blue-skinned Vegans, furry Proximans, completely non-humanoid Sirians and Antarians. They were here as traders, observers, tourists, whatever else of a non-military nature one can imagine.

I made an absent-minded way through the crowds. A sudden crack on the side of my head, nearly bowling me over, brought me to awareness. I looked up into the arrogant face of one of the new recruits and heard him rasp, "Watch where you're going, Terrie!"

The young blood in the Valgolian military is deliberately trained to harshness, even brutality, for our militarism must impress such backward colonies as Earth. It goes against our grain, but it is necessary. At another time this might have annoyed me. I could have pulled rank on him. Not only was I an officer, but such treatment must be used with intellectual deliberation. The occasional young garrison trooper who comes here with the idea that the natives are an inferior breed to be kicked around misses the whole point of Empire. If, indeed, Earth's millions were an inferior breed, I wouldn't have been here at all. Valgol needs an economic empire, but if all we had in mind was serfdom we'd be perfectly content with the plodding animal life of Deneb VII or a hundred other worlds.

I cringed appropriately, as if I didn't understand Valgolian Universal, and slunk past him. But it griped me to be taken for a Terrie. If I was to become an Earthling, I would at least be a self-respecting one.

THERE were plenty of Terries—Terrestrials—around, of course, moving with their odd combination of slavish deference toward Valgolians and arrogant superiority toward mere Earthlings. They have adopted the habits and customs of civilization, entered the Imperial service, speak Valgolian even with their families. Many of them shave their heads save for a scalp lock, in imitation of the crest, and wear

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white robes suggesting those of civil functionaries at home.

I've always felt a little sorry for the class. They work, and study, and toady to us, and try so hard to be like us. It's frustrating, because that's exactly what we don't want. Valgolians are Valgolians and Earthlings are men of Earth. Well, Terries are important to the ultimate aims of the Empire, but not in the way they think they are. They serve as another symbol of Valgolian conquest for Earth to hate.

I entered the Administration Building. They expected me there and took me at once to the office of General Vorka, who's a general only as far as this solar system is concerned. Had there been any Earthlings around, I would have saluted to conform to the show of militarism, but General Vorka sat alone behind his desk, and I merely said, "Hello, Coordinator."

The sleeves of his tunic rolled up, the heat of North America beading his forehead with sweat, the big man looked up at me. "Ah, yes. I'm glad you're finally prepared. The sooner we get this thing started—" He extended a silver galla-dust box. "Sniff? Have a seat, Conru."

I inhaled gratefully and relaxed. The Coordinator picked up a sheaf of papers on his desk and leafed through them. "Umm-mm, only fifty-two years old and a captain already. Remarkably able, a young

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man like you. And your work hitherto has been outstanding. That Vegan business . . ."

I said yes, I knew, but could he please get down to business. You couldn't blame me for being a bit anxious to begin. Disguised as I was as an Earthman, I felt uncomfortable, embarrassed, almost, at being with my ex-countrymen.

The Coordinator shrugged. "Well, if you can carry this business off—fine. If you fail, you may die quite unpleasantly. That's their trouble, Conru: you wouldn't be regarded as an individual, but as a Valgolian. Did you know that they even make such distinctions among themselves? I mean races and sub-races and social castes and the like; it's keeping them divided and impotent, Conru. It's also keeping them out of the Empire. A shame."

I KNEW all that, of course, but I merely nodded. Coordinator Vorka was a wonderful man in his field, and if he tended to be on the garrulous side, what could I do? I said, "I know that, sir. I also know I was picked for a dangerous job because you thought I could fill the role. But I still don't know exactly what the job is."

Coordinator Vorka smiled. "I'm afraid I can't tell you much more than you must already have

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guessed," he said. "The anarch movement here—the rebels, that is—is getting no place, primarily because of internal difficulties. When members of the same group spit epithets at each other referring to what they consider racial or national distinctions which determine superiority or inferiority, the group is bound to be an insecure one. Such insecurity just does not make for a strong rebellion, Conru. They try, and we goad them—but dissention splits them constantly and their revolutions fizzle out.

"They just can't unite against us, can't unite at all. Conru, you know how we've tried to educate them. It's worked, too, to some extent. But you can't educate three billion people who have a whole cultural pattern behind them."

I winced. "Three billion?"

"Certainly. Earth is a rich planet, Conru, and a fairly crowded one at the same time. Bickering is inevitable. It's a part of their culture, as much as cooperation has been a part of ours."

I nodded. "We learned the hard way. The old Valgol was a poor planet and we had to unite to conquer space or we could not have survived."

The Coordinator sniffed again at his silver box. "Of course. And we're trying to help these people unite. They don't have to make the same mistakes we did, long ago. They don't have to at all. Get them to hate us enough, get them to hate us until all their own clannish hatreds don't count at all . . . Well, you know what happened on Samtrak."

I knew. The Samtraks are now the entrepreneurs of the Empire, really ingenious traders, but within the memory of some of our older men they were a sore-spot. They didn't understand the meaning of Empire any more than Earth does, and they never did understand it until we goaded them into open rebellion. The very reverse of divide and rule, you might say, and it worked. We withdrew trading privileges one by one, until they revolted successfully, thus educating themselves sociologically in only a few generations.

VORKA said, "The problem of Earth is not quite that simple." He leaned back, made a bridge of his fingers, and peered across them at me. "Do you know precisely what a provocateur job is, Conru?"

I said that I did, but only in a hazy way, because until now my work had been pretty much restricted to social relations on the more advanced Empire planets. However, I told him that I did know the idea was to provoke discontent and, ultimately, rebellion.

The Coordinator smiled. "Well, that's just the starter, Conru. It's a lot more complex than that. Each planet has its own special problems.

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The Samtraks, for example, had a whole background of cutthroat competition. That was easy: we eliminated that by showing them what *real* cutthroat competition could be like. But Earth is different. Look at it this way. They fight among themselves. Because of their mythical distinctions, not realizing that there are no inferior races, only more or less advanced ones, and that individuals must be judged as individuals, not as members of groups, nations or races. A planet like Earth can be immensely valuable to the Empire, but not if it has to be garrisoned. Its contribution must be voluntary and wholehearted."

"A difficult problem," I said. "My opinion is that we should treat all exactly alike—*force* them to abandon their unrealistic differences."

"Exactly!" The Coordinator seemed pleased, but, actually, this was pretty elementary stuff. "We're never too rough on the eager lads who come here from Valgol and kick the natives around a bit. We even encourage it when the spirit of rebelliousness dies down."

I told him I had met one.

"Irritating, wasn't it, Conru? Humiliating. Of course, these lads will be reconditioned to civilization when they finish their military service and prepare for more specialized work. Yes, treating all Earthlings alike is the solution. We put restrictions on these colonials; they can't hold top jobs, and so on. And we encourage wild stories about brutality on our part. Not enough to make everybody mad at us, or even a majority—the rumored tyranny has always happened to someone else. But there's a certain class of beings who'll get fighting mad, and that's the class we want."

"The leaders," I chimed in. "The idealists. Brave, intelligent, patriotic. The kind who probably wouldn't be a part of this racial bickering, anyway."

"Right," said the Coordinator. "We'll give them the ammunition for their propaganda. We've *been* doing it. Result: the leaders get mad. Races, religions, nationalities, they hate us worse than they hate each other."

THE way he painted it, I was hardly needed at all. I told him that.

"Ideally, that would be the situation, Conru. Only it doesn't work that way." He took out a soft cloth and wiped his forehead. "Even the leaders are too involved in this myth of differences and they can't concentrate all their efforts. Luron, of course, would be the other alternative—"

That was a very logical statement, but sometimes logic has a way of making you laugh, and I was laughing now. Luron considered itself our arch-enemy. With a few dozen allies on a path of con-

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quest, Luron thought it could wrest Empire from our hands. Well, we let them play. And each time Luron swooped down on one of the more primitive planets, we let them, for Luron would serve as well as ourselves in goading backward peoples to unite and advance. Perhaps Luron, as a social entity, grew wiser each time. Certainly the primitive colonials did. Luron had started a chain reaction which threatened to overthrow the tyranny of superstition on a hundred planets. Good old Luron, our arch-enemy, would see the light itself some day.

The Coordinator shook his head. "Can't use Luron here. Technologies are entirely too similar. It might shatter both planets, and we wouldn't want that."

"So what do we use?"

"You, Conru. You get in with the revolutionaries, you make sure that they want to fight, you—"

"I see," I told him. "Then I try to stop it at the last minute. Not so soon that the rebellion doesn't help at all—"

The Coordinator put his hand down flat. "Nothing of the sort. They *must* fight. And they must be defeated, again and again, if necessary, until they are ready to succeed. That will be, of course, when they are *totally* against us."

I stood up. "I understand."

He waved me back into the chair. "You'll be lucky to understand it by the time you're finished with this assignment and transferred to another . . . that is, if you come out of this one alive."

I smiled a bit sheepishly and told him to go ahead.

"We have some influence in the underground movement, as you might logically expect. The leader is a man we worked very hard to have elected."

"A member of one of the despised races?" I guessed.

"The best we could do at this point was to help elect someone from a minority sub-group of the dominant white race. The leader's name is Levinsohn. He is of the white sub-group known as Jews."

"HOW well is this Levinsohn accepted by the movement?"

"Considerable resistance and hostility," the Coordinator said. "That's to be expected. However, we've made sure that there is no other organization the minority-haters can join, so they have to follow him or quit. He's able, all right; one of the most able men they have, which helps our aims. Even those who discriminate against Jews reluctantly admire him. He's moved the headquarters of the movement out into space, and the man's so brilliant that we don't even know where. We'll find out, mainly through you, I hope, but that isn't the important thing."

"What is?" I asked, baffled.

"To report on the unification of Earth. It's possible that the anarch

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movement can achieve it under Levinsohn. In that case, we'll make sure they win, or think they win, and will gladly sign a treaty giving Earth equal planetary status in the Empire."

"And if unity hasn't been achieved?"

"We simply crush this rebellion and make them start all over again. They'll have learned some degree of unity from this revolt and so the next one will be more successful." He stood up and I got out of my chair to face him. "That's for the future, though. We'll work out our plans from the results of this campaign."

"But isn't there a lot of danger in the policy of fomenting rebellion against us?" I asked.

He lifted his shoulders. "Evolution is always painful, forced evolution even more so. Yes, there are great dangers, but advance information from you and other agents can reduce the risk. It's a chance we must take, Conru."

"Conrad," I corrected him, smiling. "Plain Mr. Conrad Haugen . . . of Earth."

II

A FEW days later, I left North America Center, and in spite of the ominous need to hurry, my eastward journey was a ramble. The anarchs would be sure to check my movements as far back as they could, and my story had better ring true. For the present, I must *be* my role, a vagabond.

The city was soon behind me. It was far from other settlement—it is good policy to keep the Centers rather isolated, and we could always contact our garrisons in native towns quickly enough. Before long I was alone in the mountains.

I liked that part of the trip. The Rockies are huge and serene, a fresh cold wind blows from their peaks and roars in the pines, brawling rivers foam through their dales and canyons—it is a big landscape, clean and strong and lonely. It speaks with silence.

I hitched a ride for some hundreds of miles with one of the great truck-trains that dominate the western highways. The driver was Earthling, and though he complained much about the Valgolian tyranny he looked well-fed, healthy, secure. I thought of the wars which had been laying the planet waste, the social ruin and economic collapse which the Empire had mended, and wondered if Terra would ever be fit to rule itself.

I came out of the enormous mountainlands into the sage plains of Nevada. For a few days I worked at a native ranch, listening to the talk and keeping my mouth shut. Yes, there was discontent!

"Their taxes are killing me," said the owner. "What the hell incentive do I have to produce if they take it away from me?" I nodded, but thought: *Your kind was paying*

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more taxes in the old days, and had less to show for it. Here you get your money back in public works and universal security. No one on Earth is cold or hungry. Can you only produce for your own private gain, Earthling?

"The labor draft got my kid the other day," said the foreman. "He'll spend two good years of his life working for them, and prob'ly come back hopheaded about the good o' the Empire."

There was a time, I thought, *when millions of Earthlings clamored for work, or spent years fighting their wars, gave their youth to a god of battle who only clamored for more blood. And how can we have a stable society without educating its members to respect it?*

"I *want* another kid," said the female cook. "Two ain't really enough. They're good boys, but I want a girl too. Only the Eridanian law says if I go over my quota, if I have one more, they'll sterilize me! And they'd do it, the meddling devils."

A billion Earthlings are all the Solar System can hold under decent standards of living without exhausting what natural resources their own culture left us, I thought. *We aren't ready to permit emigration; our own people must come first. But these beings can live well here. Only now that we've eliminated famine, plague, and war, they'd breed beyond reason, breed till all the old evils came back to throttle them, if we didn't have strict population control.*

"YEAH," said her husband bitterly. "They never even let my cousin have kids. Sterilized him damn near right after he was born."

Then he's a moron, or carries hemophilia, or has some other hereditary taint, I thought. *Can't they see we're doing it for their own good? It costs us fantastically in money and trouble, but the goal is a level of health and sanity such as this race never in its history dreamed possible.*

"They're stranglin' faith," muttered someone else.

Anyone in the Empire may worship as he chooses, but should permission be granted to preach demonstrable falsehoods, archaic superstitions, or antisocial nonsense? The old "free" Earth was not noted for liberalism.

"We want to be free."

Free? Free for what? To loose the thousand Earthly races and creeds and nationalisms on each other—and on the Galaxy—to wallow in barbarism and slaughter and misery as before we came? To let our works and culture be thrown in the dust, the labor of a century be demolished, not because it is good or bad but simply because it is Valgolian? Epsilon Eridanian!

"We'll be free. Not too long to wait, either—"

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That's up to nobody else but you!

I couldn't get much specific information, but then I hadn't expected to. I collected my pay and drifted on eastward, talking to people of all classes—farmers, mechanics, shopowners, tramps, and such data as I gathered tallied with those of Intelligence.

About twenty-five per cent of the population, in North America at least—it was higher in the Orient and Africa—was satisfied with the Imperium, felt they were better off than they would have been in the old days. "The Eridanians are pretty decent, on the whole. Some of 'em come in here and act nice and human as you please."

Some fifty per cent was vaguely dissatisfied, wanted "freedom" without troubling to define the term, didn't like the taxes or the labor draft or the enforced disarmament or the legal and social superiority of Valgolians or some such thing, had perhaps suffered in the reconquest. But this group constituted no real threat. It would tend to be passive whatever happened. Its greatest contribution would be sporadic rioting.

The remaining twenty-five per cent was bitter, waiting its chance, muttering of a day of revenge—and some portion of this segment was spreading propaganda, secretly manufacturing and distributing weapons, engaging in clandestine military drill, and maintaining contact with the shadowy Legion of Freedom.

Childish, melodramatic name! But it had been well chosen to appeal to a certain type of mind. The real, organized core of the anarch movement was highly efficient. In those months I spent wandering and waiting, its activities mounted almost daily.

THE illegal radio carried unending programs, propaganda, fabricated stories of Valgolian brutality. I knew from personal experience that some were false, and I knew the whole Imperial system well enough to spot most of the rest at least partly invented. I realized we couldn't trace such a well-organized setup of mobile and coordinated units, and jamming would have been poor tactics, but even so—

The day is coming . . . Earthmen, free men, be ready to throw off your shackles . . . Stand by for freedom!

I stuck to my role. When autumn came, I drifted into one of the native cities, New Chicago, a warren of buildings near the remains of the old settlement, the same gigantic slum that its predecessor had been. I got a room in a cheap hotel and a job in a steel mill.

I was Conrad Haugen, Norwegian-American, assigned to a spaceship by the labor draft and liking it well enough to re-enlist when

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my term was up. I had wandered through much of the Empire and had had a great deal of contact with Eridanians, but was most emphatically not a Terrie. In fact, I thought it would be well if the redskin yoke could be thrown off, both because of liberty and the good pickings to be had in the Galaxy if the Empire should collapse. I had risen to second mate on an interstellar tramp, but could get no further because of the law that the two highest officers must be Valgolian. That had embittered me and I returned to Earth, footloose and looking for trouble.

I FOUND it. With officer's training and the strength due to a home planet with a gravity half again that of Earth, I had no difficulty at all becoming a foreman. There was a big fellow named Mike Riley who thought he was entitled to the job. We settled it behind a shed, with the workmen looking on, and I beat him unconscious as fast as possible. The raw, sweating savagery of it made me feel ill inside. *They'd let* this *loose among the stars!*

After that I was one of the boys and Riley was my best friend. We went out together, wenching and drinking, raising hell in the cold dirty canyons of steel and stone which the natives called streets. *Valgolia, Valgolia, the clean bare windswept heights of your mountains, soughing trees and thunderous waters and Maara waiting for me to come home!* Riley often proposed that we find an Eridanian and beat him to death, and I would agree, hiccupping, because I knew they didn't go alone into native quarters any more. I sat in the smoky reek of the bars, half deafened by the clatter and raucousness called music, trying not to think of a certain low-ceilinged, quiet tavern amid the gardens of Kalariho, and sobbed the bitterness of Conrad Haugen into my beer.

"Dirty redskins," I muttered. "Dirty, stinking, bald-headed, sons of bitches. Them and their goddamn Empire. Why, y'know, if 't hadn' been f' their laws I'd be skipper o' my own ship now. I knew more'n that slob o' a captain. But he was born Eridanian—God, to get my hands on his throat!"

Riley nodded. Through the haze of smoke I saw that his eyes were narrowed. He wasn't drunk when he didn't want to be, and at times like this he was suddenly as sober as I was, and that in spite of not having a Valgolian liver.

I bided my time, not too obviously anxious to contact the Legion. I just thought they were swell fellows, the only brave men left in the rotten, stinking Empire; I'd sure be on their side when the day came. I worked in the mill, and when out with the boys lamented the fact that we were really producing for the damned Eridanians, we couldn't even keep the

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products of our own sweat. I wasn't obtrusive about it, of course. Most of the time we were just boozing. But when the talk came to the Empire, I made it clear just where I stood.

THE winter went. I continued the dreary round of days, wondering how long it would take, wondering how much time was left. If the Legion was at all interested, they would be checking my background right now. Let them. There wouldn't be much to check, but what there was had been carefully manufactured by the experts of the Intelligence Service.

Riley came into my room one evening. His face was tight, and he plunged to business. "Con, do you really mean all you've said about the Empire?"

"Why, of course. I—" I glanced out the window, as if expecting to see a spy. If there were any, I knew he would be native. The Empire just doesn't have enough men for a secret police, even if we wanted to indulge in that sort of historically ineffective control.

"You'd like to fight them? Like really to help the Legion of Freedom when they strike?"

"You bet your obscenity life!" I snarled. "When they land on Earth, I'll get a gun somewhere and be right there in the middle of the battle with them!"

"Yeah." Riley puffed a cigaret for a while. Then he said, "Look, I can't tell you much. I'm taking a chance just telling you this. It could mean my life if you passed it on to the Eridanians."

"I won't."

His eyes were bleak. "You damn well better not. If you're caught at that—"

He drew a finger sharply across his throat.

"Quit talking like a B-class stereo," I bristled. "If you've got something to tell me, let's have it. Otherwise get out."

"Yeah, sure. We checked up on you, Con, and we think you're as good a prospect as we ever came across. If you want to fight the Eridanians now—*join the Legion* now —here's your chance."

"My God, you know I do! But who—"

"I can't tell you a thing. But if you really want to join, memorize this." Riley gave me a small card on which was written a name and address. "Destroy it, thoroughly. Then quit at the mill and drift to this other place, as if you'd gotten tired of your work and wanted to hit the road again. Take your time, don't make a beeline for it. When you do arrive, they'll take care of you."

I nodded, grimly. "I'll do it, Mike. And thanks!"

"Just my job." He smiled, relaxing, and pulled a flask from his overcoat. "Okay, Con, that's that. We'd better not go out to drink, after this, but nothing's to stop us from getting stinko here."

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III

SPRING had come and almost gone when I wandered into the little Maine town which was my destination. It lay out of the way, with forested hills behind it and the sea at its foot. Most of the houses were old, solidly built, almost like parts of the land, and the inhabitants were slow-spoken, steady folk, fishermen and artisans and the like, settled here and at home with the darkling woods and the restless sea and the high windy sky. I walked down a narrow street with a cool salt breeze ruffling my hair and decided that I liked Portsboro. It reminded me of my own home, twenty light-years away on the wide beaches of Kealvigh.

I made my way to Nat Hawkins' store and asked for work like any drifter. But when we were alone in the back room, I told him, "I'm Conrad Haugen. Mike Riley said you'd be looking for me."

He nodded calmly. "I've been expecting you. You can work here a few days, sleep at my house, and we'll run the tests after dark."

He was old for an Earthling, well over sixty, with white hair and lined leathery face. But his blue eyes were as keen and steady, his gnarled hands as strong and sure as those of any young man. He spoke softly and steadily, around the pipe which rarely left his mouth, and there was a serenity in him which I could hardly associate with anarch fanaticism. But the first night he led me into his cellar, and through a well-hidden trapdoor to a room below, and there he had a complete psychological laboratory.

I gaped at the gleaming apparatus. "How off Earth—"

"It came piece by piece, much of it from Epsilon Eridani itself," he smiled. "There is, after all, no ban on humans owning such material. But to play safe, we spread the purchases over several years, and made them in the names of many people."

"But you—"

"I took a degree in psychiatry once. I can handle this."

He could. He put me through the mill in the next few nights—intelligence tests, psychometry, encephalography, narcosis, psycho-probing, everything his machines and his skill could cover. He did not find out anything we hadn't meant to be found out. The Service had ways of guarding its agents with counter-blocks. But he got a very thorough picture of Conrad Haugen.

In the end he said, still calmly, "This is amazing. You have an IQ well over the borderline of genius, an astonishing variety of assorted knowledge about the Empire and about technical subjects, and an implacable hatred of Eridanian rule—based on personal pique and containing self-seeking elements, but no less firm for that. You're out for yourself, but you'll stand by your comrades and your cause. We'd

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never hoped for more recruits of your caliber."

"When do I start?" I asked impatiently.

"Easy, easy," he smiled. "There's time. We've waited fifty years; we can wait a while longer." He riffled through the dossier. "Actually, the difficulty is where to assign you. A man who knows astrogation, the use of weapons and machines, and the Empire, who is physically strong as a bull, can lead men, and has a dozen other accomplishments, really seems wasted on any single job. I'm not sure, but I think you'll do best as a roving agent, operating between Main Base and the planets where we have cells, and helping with the work at the base when you're there."

MY HEART fairly leaped into my throat. This was more than *I* had dared hope for!

"I think," said Nat Hawkins, "you'd better just drop out of sight now. Go to Hood Island and stay there till the spaceship comes next time. You can spend the interval profitably, resting and getting a little fattened up; you look half starved. And Barbara can tell you about the Legion." His leather face smiled itself into a mesh of fine wrinkles. "I think you deserve that, Conrad. And so does Barbara."

Mentally, I shrugged. My stay in New Chicago had pretty well convinced me that all Earthling females were sluts. And what of it?

The following night, Hawkins and I rowed out to Hood Island. It lay about a mile offshore, a wooded, rocky piece of land on which a moon-whitened surf boomed and rattled. The place had belonged to the Hood family since the first settlements here, but Barbara was the last of them.

Hawkins' voice came softly to me above the crash of surf, the surge of waves and windy roar of trees as we neared the dock. "She has more reason than most to hate the Eridanians. The Hoods used to be great people around here. They were just about ruined when the redskins first came a-conquering, space bombardment wiped out their holdings, but they made a new start. Then her grandfather and all his brothers were killed in the revolt. Ten years ago, her father was caught while trying to hijack a jetload of guns, and her mother didn't live long after that. Then her brother was drafted into a road crew and reported killed in an accident. Since then she hasn't lived for much except the Legion."

"I don't blame her," I said. My voice was a little tight, for indeed I didn't. But somebody has to suffer; civilization has a heavy price. I couldn't help adding, "But the Empire's lately begun paying pensions to cases like that."

"I know. She draws hers, too, and uses it for the Legion."

That, of course, was the reason for the pensions.

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The boat bumped against the dock. Hawkins threw the painter up to the man who suddenly emerged from the shadow. I saw the cold silver moonlight gleam off the rifle in his hand. "You know me, Eb," said Hawkins. "This here's Con Haugen. I slipped you the word about him."

"Glad to know you, Con." Eb's horny palm clasped mine. I liked his looks, as I did those of most of the higher-up Legionnaires. They were altogether different from the low-caste barbarians who were all the rebels I'd seen before. They had a great load of ignorance to drag with them.

We went up a garden path to a rambling stone house. Inside, it was long and low and filled with the memoirs of more gracious days, art and fine furniture, books lining the walls, a fire crackling ruddily in the living room.

"Barbara Hood—Conrad Haugen."

ALMOST, I gaped at her. I had expected some gaunt, dowdy fanatic, a little mad perhaps. But she was—well, she was tall and supple and clad in a long dark-blue evening gown that shimmered against her white skin. She was not conventionally pretty, her face was too strong for all of its fine lines, but she had huge blue eyes and a wide soft mouth and a stubborn chin. The light glowed gold on the hair that tumbled to her shoulders.

I blurted something out and she smiled, with a curious little twist that somehow caught in me, and said merely, "Hello, Conrad."

"Glad to be here," I mumbled.

"The spaceship should arrive in a month or so," she went on. "I'll teach you as much as I can in that time. And you'd better get your own special knowledge onto a record wire, just in case. I understand you've been in the Vegan System, for instance, which nobody else in the Legion knows very much about."

Her tone was cool and business-like, but with an underlying warmth. It was like the sea wind which blew over the islands, and as reviving. I recovered myself and helped mix some drinks. The rest of the evening passed very pleasantly.

Later a servant showed me to my room, a big one overlooking the water. I lay for a while listening to the waves, thinking drowsily how rebellion, when its motives were honest, drew in the best natives of any world, and presently I fell asleep.

The month passed all too quickly and agreeably. I learned things which Intelligence had spent the last three years trying to find out, and dared not attempt to transmit the information. That was maddening, though I knew there was time. But otherwise—

I puttered about the place. There were only three servants, old family retainers who had also joined the anarchs. They had little modern

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machinery, and of course Earthlings weren't allowed robots, so there was need for an extra man or two. I cut wood and repaired the roof and painted the boathouse, spaded the garden and cleared out brush and set up a new picket fence. It was good to use my hands and muscles again.

And then Barbara was around to help with most of what I did. In jeans and jersey, the sun ablaze on her hair, laughing at my clumsy jokes or frowning over some tough bit of work, she was another being than the cool, lovely woman who talked books and music and history with me in the evenings, or the crisp bitter anarch who spat facts and figures at me like an angry machine. And yet they were all her. I remembered Ydis, who was dead, and the old pain stirred again. But Barbara was alive.

She was more alive to me than most of Valgolia.

I make no apologies for my feelings. I had been away from anything resembling home for some two years now. But I was careful to remain merely friendly with Barbara.

SHE didn't know a great deal about the rebel movement—no one agent on Earth did—but her knowledge was still considerable. There was a fortified base somewhere out in space, built up over a period of four years with the help of certain unnamed elements or

planets outside the Empire. I suspected several rival states of that!

Weapons of all kinds were manufactured there in quantities sufficient to arm the million or so rebels of the "regular" force, the twenty million or so in the Solar System and elsewhere who held secret drills and conducted terrorist activities, and the many millions more who were expected to rise spontaneously when the rebel fleet struck.

There was close coordination and a central command at Main Base for the undergrounds of all dissatisfied planets—a new and formidable feature which had not been present in the earlier uprisings. There were rumors of a new and terrible weapon being developed.

In any case, the plan was to assault Epsilon Eridani itself simultaneously with the uprisings in the colonies, so that the Imperial fleet would be recalled to defend the mother world. The anarchs hoped to blast Valgolia to ruin in a few swift blows, and expected that the

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Empire's jealous neighbors would sweep in to complete the wreckage.

This gentle girl spoke of the smashing of worlds, the blasting of helpless humans, and the destruction of a culture as if it were a matter of insect extermination.

"Have you ever thought," I asked casually once, "that the Juranians and the Sligh and our other hypothetical allies may not respect the integrity of Sol any more than the Eridanians do?"

"We can handle them," she answered confidently. "Oh, it won't be easy, that time of transition. But we'll be free."

"And what then?" I went on. "I don't want to be defeatist, Barbara, but you know as well as I do that the Eridanians didn't conquer all mankind at a single swoop. When they invented the interstellar engine and arrived here, man was tearing the Solar System apart in a war between super-nations that was rapidly reducing him to barbarism. The redskins traded for a while, sold arms, some of their adventurers took sides in the conflict, the government stepped in to protect Eridanian citizens and investments—the side which the Eridanians helped won the war, then found its allies were running things and tried to revolt against the protectorate—and without really meaning to, the strangers were conquering and ruling Earth.

"But the different factions of man still hate each other's guts. There are still capitalists and communists, blacks, whites and Browns, Hindus and Moslems, Germans and Frenchmen, city people and country people —a million petty divisions. There'll be civil war as soon as the Eridanians are gone."

"Some, perhaps," she agreed. "But I think it can be handled. If we have to have civil wars, well, let's get them over with and live as free men."

Personally, I could see nothing in the sort of military dictatorship that would inevitably arise which was preferable to an alien, firm, but just rule that insured stability and a reasonable degree of individual liberty.

But I didn't say that aloud.

ANOTHER time we talked of the de-industrialization of Earth. Barbara was, of course, venomous about it. "We were rich once," she said. "All Earth was. We have one of the richest planets in the Galaxy. But because their own world is poor, the redskins have to take the natural resources of their conquests. Earth is a granary and a lumberyard for Valgolia, and the iron of Mars and the petrolite of Venus go back to their industry. What few factories they allow us, they take their fat percentage of the product."

"Certainly they've made us economically dependent," I said, "and their standard of living is undoubtedly higher than ours. But ours has, on the whole, gone up since the

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conquest. We eat better, we're healthier, we aren't burdened with the cost of past and present and future wars. Our natural resources aren't being squandered. The forests and watersheds and farmlands we ruined are coming back under Eridanian supervision."

She gave me an odd look. "I thought you didn't like the Empire."

"I don't," I growled. "I don't want to be held back just because I'm white-skinned. But I've known enough reddies personally so that I try to be fair."

"It's all right with me," she said. "I can see your point, intellectually, though I can't really *feel* it. But not many of the people will out at Main Base."

"Free men," I muttered sardonically.

We went fishing, and swam in the tumbling surf, and stretched lazily on the beach with the sun pouring over us. Or we might go tramping off into the woods on a picnic, to run laughing back when a sudden rain rushed out of the sky, and afterward sit with beer and cheese sandwiches listening to a wire of Beethoven or Mozart or Tschaikowsky—the old Earthlings could write music, if they did nothing else!—and to the rain shouting on the roof. We might have a little highly illegal target practice, or a game of chess, or long conversations which wandered off every which way. I began to have a sneaking hope that the spaceship would be delayed.

We went out one day in Barbara's little catboat. The waves danced around us, chuckling against the hull, glittering with sunlight, and the sail was like a snow mountain against the sky. For a while we chatted dreamily, ate our lunch, threw the scraps to the hovering gulls. Then Barbara fell silent.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing. Touch of *Weltschmerz,* maybe." She smiled at me. "You know, Con, you don't really belong in the Legion."

"How so?" I raised my eyebrows.

"You—well, you're so darned honest, so really decent under that carefully rough surface, so—reasonable. You'll never make a good fanatic."

Honest! I looked away from her. The bright day seemed suddenly to darken.

IV

SPACESHIPS from Main Base had little trouble coming to Earth with their cargoes of guns, propaganda, instructors, and whatever else the rebels on the planet needed. They would take up an orbit just beyond the atmosphere and send boats to the surface after dark. There was little danger of their being detected if they took the usual precautions; a world is simply too big to blockade completely.

Ours dropped on noiseless grav-

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itic beams into the nighted island woods. We had been watching for it the last few days, and now Eb came running to tell us it was here. The pilot followed after him.

"Harry Kane, Conrad Haugen," Barbara introduced us.

I shook hands, sizing him up. He was tall for an Earthling, almost as big as I, dark-haired, with good-looking young features. He wore some approximation of a uniform, dark-blue tunic and breeches, peaked cap, captain's insignia, which gave him a rather dashing look. It shouldn't have made any difference to me, of course, but I didn't like the way he smiled at Barbara.

She explained my presence, and he nodded eagerly. "Glad to have you, Haugen. We need good men, and badly." Then to her: "Get Hawkins. You and he are recalled to Main Base."

"What? But—"

A dark exultation lit his face. "The time for action is near—very near! We're pulling all our best agents off the planets. They can work more effectively with the fleet now."

I tried to look as savagely gleeful as they, but inwardly I groaned. How in all the hells was I going to contact Vorka? If I were stranded out in space when the fleet got under way—no, they must have an ultrabeam. I'd manage somehow to call on that even if they caught me at it.

We sent Eb in a boat to get Hawkins while Barbara and I packed a few necessities. Kane paced back and forth, spilling out the news from Main Base, word of mighty forces gathering, rumors of help promised from outside, it was like the thunder which mutters just before a gale.

Presently Hawkins arrived. The old man's calm was undisturbed: he puffed his pipe and said quietly, "I called up my housekeeper, told her my sister in California was suddenly taken sick and I was leaving at once for the transcontinental jetport. Just to account for disappearing, you know. There aren't any Eridanians or Terries hereabouts, but we desperate characters—" he grinned, briefly—"can't be too careful. Brought my equipment along, of course. I suppose they want me to do psychometry on fleet personnel?"

"Something on that order. I don't know."

We made our way through a fine drizzle of rain to the little torpedo of the spaceboat. I looked around into the misty dark and breathed a deep lungful of the cool wet wind. And I saw that Barbara was doing the same.

SHE smiled up at me through the night and the thin sad rain. "Earth is a beautiful world, Con," she whispered. "I wonder if we'll ever see it again."

I squeezed her hand, silently, and we crowded into the boat.

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Kane made a smooth takeoff. In minutes we were beyond the atmosphere, Earth was a great glowing shield of cloudy blue behind us, and the stars were bitter bright against darkness. We sent a coded call signal and got a directional beam from the ship. Before long we were approaching it.

I studied the lean black cruiser. She seemed to be of about the same design as the old Solarian interplanetary ships, modified somewhat to accommodate the star drive. Apparently, she was one of those built at Main Base. Her bow guns were dark shadows against the clotted cold silver of the Milky Way. I thought of the death and the ruin which could flame from them, I thought of the hell she and her kind bore—atomic bombs, radiodust bombs, chemical bombs, disease bombs, gravity snatchers, needle beams, disintegrative shells, darkness and doom and the new barbarism—and felt a stiffening within me. Fostering this murderousness was a frightful risk. The main defense against it was Intelligence, and that depended on agents like myself. Perhaps *only* myself.

The crew was rather small, no battles being anticipated. But they were well disciplined, uniformed and trained, a new Solarian army built up from the fragments of the old. The captain was a stiff gray German who had been a leader in the earlier revolt and since fled to space, but most of the officers, such as Kane, were young and violent in their eagerness.

We orbited around the planet for another day or so till all the boats had returned. There was tension in the ship—if the Imperial navy should happen to spot us, we were done. Off duty, we would sit around talking, smoking, playing games with little concentration.

Kane spent most of his free hours with Barbara. They had much to talk about. I swallowed a certain irrational jealousy and wandered around cautiously pumping as many men as I could.

We got under way at last. By this time I had learned that Main Base was a planet, but no more. Only the highest leadership of the Legion knew its location, and they were pledged to swallow the poison they always carried if there seemed to be any danger of capture.

For several days by the clocks we ran outward, roughly toward Draco. Our velocity was not revealed, and the slow shift in the outside view didn't help much. I guess that we had come perhaps ten parsecs, but that was only a guess.

"Approaching Main Base. Stand by."

WHEN the call rang hollowly down the ship's passageways, I could feel the weariness and tautness easing, I could see homecoming in the faces around me. I stole a glance at Barbara. Her eyes were wide and her lips parted, she looked

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ahead as if to stare through the metal walls. She had never been here either, here where all her dreams came home.

So we landed, we slipped down out of the dark and the cold and the void, and I heard the rattle and groan of metal easing into place. When the ship's interior grav-field was turned off, I felt a sudden heaviness; this world had almost a quarter again the pull of Earth. But people got used to that quickly enough. It was the landscape which was hard to bear.

They had told us that even though Boreas had a breathable atmosphere and a temperature not always fatally low, it was a bleak place. But to one who had never been far from the lovely lands of Earth, its impact was like a blow in the face. Barbara shuddered close to me as we came out of the airlock, and I put an arm about her waist, knowing the sudden feeling of loneliness which rose in her.

SAVE for the spaceport and other installations, Main Base was underground. There was no city to relieve the grimness of the scene. We were in a narrow valley between sheer, ragged cliffs that soared crazily into a murky sky. The sun was low, a smouldering disc of dull red like curdling blood; its sullen light glimmered on the undying snow and ice and seemed only to make the land darker. Stars glittered here and there in the dusky heavens, hard and bright and cruel, almost, as in space.

Dark sky, dark land, dark world, with the sheer terrible mountains climbing gauntly for the upper gloom, crags and glaciers like fangs against the dizzy cliffs, with the great shadows marching across the bloody snow toward us, with a crazed wind muttering and whining and chewing at our flesh. It was cold. The cold was like a knife. Pain stung with every breath and eyes watered with tears that froze on suddenly numb cheeks. A great shudder ripped through us and we ran toward the entrance to the city. The snow crunched dry and old under our boots, the cold ate up through the soles, and the wind whistled its scorn.

Even when an elevator had taken us a mile down into the warmth and light of the base, we could not forget. It was a city for a million men and other beings and more than a few women and children, a city of long streets and small neat apartments, hydroponic farms and food synthesizers, schools, shops and amusement places, factories, military barracks and arsenals, even an occasional little flower garden. Its people could live here almost indefinitely, working and waiting for their day of rising.

There was little formality in the civilian areas. Everyone who had come this far was trusted. A man came up to us new arrivals from

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Earth, asked about conditions there, and then said he would show us to our quarters. Later we would be told to whom we should report for duty.

"Let's go, then, Con," said Barbara, and slipped a cool little hand into mine. I could not refrain from casting a smug backward glance at the somewhat chapfallen Kane.

V

WE SLIPPED quickly into the the routine of the place. It was a taut-nerved, hard-working daily round. I could feel the savage expectancy building up like a physical force, but intelligent life is adaptable and we got used to it. There was work to do.

Hawkins was second in command of the psychological service, testing and screening and treating personnel, working on training and indoctrination, and with a voice in the general staff where problems of unit coordination and psychological warfare were concerned. Barbara worked under him, secretary and records keeper and general trouble-shooter. Those were high posts, but both were allowed to retain the nominally civilian status which they preferred.

Their influence and my own test scores got me appointed assistant supervisor of the shipyards. That suited me very well—I was reasonably free from direct orders and discipline, with authority to come and go pretty much as I pleased. They kept me busy; sometimes I worked the clock around, and I did my best to further production of the weapons which might destroy my planet. For whatever I did would make little difference at this late date.

A good deal of my time also went to drill with the armed forces of which, like every able-bodied younger man, I was a reserve member. They put me in an engineer unit and I soon had command of it. I did my best here too, whipping my grim young charges into a sapper group comparable to the Empire's, for I had to be above all suspicion, even of incompetence.

We worked at our learning. We went topside and shivered and manned our guns, set our mines and threw up our bridges, in the racking cold of Boreas. Over ancient snow and ice we trotted, lost in the jumbled wilderness of cruel peaks and railing wind, peeling the skin from our fingers when we touched metal, camped under scornful stars and a lash of drifting ice-dust—but we learned!

My own, more private education went on apace. I found where we were. It was a forgotten red dwarf star out near the shadowy border of the Empire, listed in the catalogues as having one Class III planet of no interest or value. That was a good choice; no spaceship would ever happen into this system by accident or exploration. The an-

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archs had built their hopes on the one lonely planet, and had named it Boreas after the god of the north wind in one of their mythologies. My company called it less complimentary things.

The base, including the attached city, was under military command which ultimately led up to the general staff of the Legion. This was a council of officers from half a score of rebellious planets, though Earthlings predominated and, of course, Simon Levinsohn held the supreme authority. I met him a few times, a gaunt, lonely man, enormously able, ridden by his cause as by a nightmare, but not unkindly on a personal level. With just that indomitable heart, the Maccabees had faced Rome's iron legions—Valgolia was greatly interested in the ancient history of a conquered province, knowing how often it held the key to current problems.

There was also a liaison officer from Luron sitting at staff meetings. Luron!

WHEN I first saw him, this Colonel Wergil, I stood stiff and cold and felt the bristling along my spine. He looked as humanoid as most of the races at the base. Hairless, faintly scaled greenish-yellow skin, six fingers to a hand, and flat chinless face don't make that breed hideous to me; I have reckoned Ganolons and Mergri among my friends. But Luron—the old and deadly rival, the lesser empire watching its chance to pounce on us, hating us for the check we are on the ambitions of their militarists. Luron.

I have no race prejudices and am willing to take the word of our comparative psychologists that there is no more inherent evil in the Luronians than in any other stock, that the peculiar cold viciousness of their civilization is a matter of unfortunate cultural rather than biological evolution and could be changed in time. But none of this alters the fact that at present they are what they are, brilliant, greedy, heartless, and a menace to the peace of the Galaxy. I have been too long engaged in the struggle between my nation and theirs to think otherwise.

Other states had sent some clandestine help to the Legion, weapons and money and vague promises. Luron, I soon found, had said it would attack us in full strength if the uprising showed a good chance of success, and meanwhile they gave assistance, credits and matériel and the still more important machine tools, and Wergil's military advice was useful.

I know now, as I suspected even then, that Levinsohn and his associates were not fooled as to Luron's ultimate intentions. Indeed, they planned to make common cause with what remained of Valgolia, as well as certain other traditional foes of their present ally, as soon as they had gained their objectives

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of independence, and stop any threat of aggression from Luron. It was shrewdly planned, but such a shaky coalition, still bleeding with the hurts and hatreds of a struggle just ended, would be weaker than the Empire, and Luron almost certainly would have sowed further dissension in it and waited for its decay before striking.

The Earthlings have a proverb to the effect that he who sups with the Devil must use a long spoon. But they seemed to have forgotten it now.

The attack, I learned, was scheduled for about four months from the time the agents were recalled. The rebels were counting on the Valgolian power being spread too thinly over the Empire to stand off their massed assault on a few key points. Then, with the home planet a radioactive ruin, with revolt in a score of planetary systems and the ensuing chaos and communications breakdown, and with the Luronians invading, the Imperial fleet and military would have to make terms with the anarchs.

IT WOULD work. I knew with a dark chill that it would work. Unless somehow I could get a warning out. That had to be done for more than the protection of Epsilon Eridani, which, even in a surprise attack could defend itself better than these conspirators realized. But all bloodshed should be spared, if possible—and the rebellion did not yet deserve to succeed, for the unity achieved thus far had been the unity of a snake pit against a temporary enemy.

Did it all rest on me? God of space, had the whole burden of history suddenly fallen on *my* shoulders?

I didn't dare think about it. I forced the consequences of failure out of my forebrain, back down into the unconscious, the breeding ground of nightmares, and lived from one day to the next. I worked, and waited, learned what I could and watched for my chance.

But it was not all grimness and concentration. It couldn't be; intelligent life just isn't built that way. We had our social activities, small gatherings or big parties, we relaxed and played. At first I found that gratifying, for it gave me a chance to pump the others. Then I found it maddening, because it kept me from snooping and laying plans. Finally it began to hurt— I was coming to know the anarchs.

They lived and laughed and loved even as humans do. They were basically as decent and reasonable as any similar group of Valgolians. Many were as tormented as I by the thought of the slaughter they readied. There were embittered ones, who had lost all they held dear, and I realized that, while civilization has its price, you can't be objective about it when you are the one who must pay. There were others who had been well off and

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had chucked all their hopes to join a desperate cause in which they happened to believe. There were children—and what had they done to deserve having their parents gambling away life?

In spite of their appearance, to which I was now accustomed, they were *human.* When I had laughed and talked and sung and drunk beer and danced and arranged entertainments with them, they were my friends.

Moodily, I began to see that I would be one of the price-payers.

I saw most of Hawkins and Barbara, and after them—because of her—Kane. The old psychologist and I got along famously. He would drop into my room for a smoke and a cup of coffee and a drawled conversation whenever he had the chance. His slow gentle voice, his trenchancy, the way the little crinkles appeared around his eyes when he smiled, reminded me of my father. I often wish those two could have met. They would have enjoyed each other.

Then Barbara would stop by on her way from work, or, better yet, she would ask me over to her apartment for a home-cooked dinner. Yes, she could cook too. We would sometimes take long walks down the corridors of the city, we even went up once in a while to the surface for a breath of cold air and loneliness, and it was the most natural thing in the world for us to go hand in hand.

There was no sunlight underground. But when the fluorotube glow shone on her hair, I thought of sunlight on Earth, the high keen light of the Colorado plateaus, the morning light stealing through the trees of Hood Island.

Ydis, Ydis, I said, once your violet eyes were like the skies over Kalariho, over Kealvigh, our home, pasture land of winds. But it has been so long. It has been ten years since you died—

I fought. May all the gods bear witness that I fought myself. And I thought I was winning.

VI

I WILL never forget one certain evening.

Hawkins and I had come over to Barbara's for supper, and the three of us were sitting now, talking. Wieniawski's Violin Concerto cried its sorrow, muted in the background, and the serene home she had made of the bare little functional apartment folded itself around us. Then Kane dropped in as he often did, with a casualness that fooled nobody, and sat with all his soul in his eyes, looking at Barbara. He was a nice kid. I didn't know why he should annoy me so.

The talk shifted to Valgolia. I found myself taking the side of my race. It wasn't that I hoped to convert anyone, but—well, it was wrong that we should be monsters in the sight of these friends.

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"Brutes," said Kane. "Two-legged animals. Damned bald-headed, copper-skinned giants. Wouldn't be quite so bad if they were octopi or insects, but they're just enough different from us to be a caricature. It's obscene."

"Sartons look like a dirty joke on mankind," I said. "Why don't you object to them?"

"They're in the same boat as us."

"Then why mix political and esthetic prejudices? And have you ever thought that you look just as funny to an Eridanian?"

"No race should look odd to another," said Nat Hawkins. He puffed blue clouds. "Even by our standards, the redskins are handsome, in a more spectacular way than humans, maybe."

"And Barbara," I smiled, with a curious little pang inside me, "would look good to any humanoid."

"I should think so," said Kane sulkily. "The redskins took enough of our women."

"Well," I said, "their original conquistadores were young and healthy, very far from home, and had just finished a hard campaign where they lost many friends. At least there were no half-breeds afterward. And since the reconquest none of their soldiers has been permitted to have anything to do with an Earthwoman against her consent. It's not their fault if the consent is forthcoming oftener than you idealists think."

"That sort of thing was more or less standard procedure at home with them, wasn't it?" asked Hawkins.

I NODDED. "The harshness of their native world forced them to develop their technology faster than on Earth, so they kept a lot of barbarian customs well into the industrial age. For instance, the rulers of the state that finally conquered all the others and unified the planet took the title *Waelsing*, Emperor, and it's still a monarchy in theory. But a limited monarchy these days, with parliamentary democracy and even local self-government of the town-meeting sort. They're highly civilized now."

"I wouldn't call that spree of conquest they went on exactly civilized."

"Well, just for argument's sake, let's try to look at it from their side," I answered. "Here their explorers arrived at Sol, found a system richer than they could well imagine—and all the wealth being burned up in fratricidal war. Their technical power was sufficiently beyond ours so that any band of adventurers could do pretty much as it wanted in the Solar System, and all native states were begging for their help. It was inevitable that they'd mix in.

"Sure, the Eridanians have been exploiting Solarian resources, though perhaps more wisely than we did. Sure, they garrison un-

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willing planets. But from their point of view, they're slowly civilizing a race of atomic-powered savages, and taking no more than their just reward for it. Sure, they've done hideous things, or were supposed to have, but there've been plenty of reforms in their policy since our last revolt. They've adopted the—the red man's burden."

"Could be. But Sol wasn't their only conquest."

"Oh, well, of course they had their time of all-out imperialism. There are still plenty of the old school around, starward the course of empire, keep the lesser breeds in their place, and so on. That's one reason why the highest posts are still reserved for members of their own race, another being that even the liberal ones don't trust us that far, yet.

"Their first fifty years or so saw plenty of aggression. But then they stabilized. They had as much as they could manage. To put it baldly, the Empire is glutted. And now, without actually admitting they ever did wrong, they're trying to make up what they did to many of their victims."

"They could do that easily enough. Just let us go free."

"I'VE already told you why they don't dare. Apart from fearing us, they're economically and militarily dependent on their colonies. You're an American, Nat. Why didn't our nation let the South go its own way when it wanted to secede? Why don't we all go back to Europe and let the Indians have our country?

"And, of course, Epsilon Eridani honestly thinks it has a great civilizing mission, and is much better for the natives than any lesser independence could ever be. In some cases, you've got to admit they're right. Have you ever seen a real simon-pure native king in action? Or read the history of nations like Germany and Russia? And why do we have to segregate races and minorities even in our own organization to prevent clashes?"

"We're getting there," said Nat Hawkins. "It's not easy, but we'll make it."

Only you're not there yet, I thought, *and for that reason you must be stopped.*

"You claim they're sated," said Barbara. "But they've kept on conquering here and there, to this very day."

"Believe it or not, but with rare exceptions that's been done reluctantly. Peripheral systems have learned how to build star ships, become nuisances or outright menaces, and the Empire has had to swallow them. Modern technology is simply too deadly for anarchy. A full-scale war can sterilize whole planets. That's another function of empire, so the Eridanians claim—just to keep civilization going till

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something better can be worked out."

"Such as what?"

"Well, several worlds already have *donagangor* status—self-government under the Emperor, representatives in the Imperial Council, and no restrictions on personal advancement of their citizens. Virtual equality with the Valgolians. And their policy is to grant such status to any colony they think is ready for it."

Hawkins shook his head. "Won't do, Con. It sounds nice, but old Tom Jefferson had the right idea. 'If men must wait in slavery until they are ready for freedom, they will wait long indeed.' "

"Who said we were slaves—" I began.

"You talk like a damned reddie yourself," said Kane. "You seem to think pretty highly of the Empire."

I GAVE him a cold look. "What do you think I'm doing here?" I snapped.

"Yeah. Yeah, sorry. I'm kind of tired. Maybe I'd better go now." Before long Kane made some rather moody good nights and went out.

Nat Hawkins twinkled at me. "I'm a little bushed myself," he said. "Guess I'll hit the bunk too."

When he was gone, I sat smoking and trying to gather up the will to leave. There was a darkness in me. What, after all, *was* I doing here? Gods, I believed I was in the right, but why is right so pitiless?

On Earth they represent the goddess of justice as blind. On Valgolia she has fangs.

Barbara came over and sat on the arm of my chair. "What's the matter, Con?" she asked. "You look pretty grim these days."

"My work's developing some complications," I said tonelessly. My mind added: *It sure is. No way to call headquarters, the rebellion gathering enormous momentum, and on a basis of treachery and racial hatred.*

Barbara's fingers rumpled my hair, the grafted hair which by now felt more a part of me than my own lost crest. "You're an odd fellow," she said quietly. "On the surface so frank and friendly and cheerful, and down underneath you're hiding yourself and your private unhappiness."

"Why," I looked up at her, astonished, "even the psychologists—"

"They're limited, Con. They can measure, but they can't feel. Not the way—"

She stopped, and the light glowed in her hair and her eyes were wide and serious on mine and one small hand stole over to touch my fingers. Blindly, I wrenched my face away.

Her voice was low. "It's some other woman, isn't it?"

"Other—? Well, no. There was

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one, but she's dead now. She died ten years ago."

Ydis, Ydis!

"Your wife?"

I nodded. "We were only married for three years. My daughter is still alive; she's going on twelve now. But I haven't seen her for over two years. She's not on Earth. I wonder if she even thinks of me."

"Con," said Barbara, very softly and gravely, "you can't go on mourning a woman forever."

"I'm not. Forget it. I shouldn't have spoken about it."

"You needed to. That's all right."

"My girl ought to have a mother—" The words came of themselves. What followed thereafter seemed also to happen without my willing it.

Presently Barbara stood back from me. She was laughing, low and sweet and joyous. "Con, you old sourpuss, cheer up! It isn't that bad, you know!"

I managed a wry grin, though it seemed to need all the energies left in me. "You look so happy your fool self that I have to counterbalance it."

"Con, if you knew how I'd been hoping!"

We talked for a long time, but she did most of it—the plans, the hopes, the trip we were going to take and the house we were going to build down by the seashore—"Mary," my daughter, was going to have a home, along with the dozen brothers and sisters she'd have in due course—after the war.

After the war.

I left, finally, stumbling like a blind man toward my quarters. Oh, yes, I loved her and she loved me and we were going to have a home and a sailboat and a dozen children, after the war, when Earth was free. What more could a man ask for?

It had been many years since I'd needed autohypnosis to put myself to sleep, but I used it now.

VII

A MONTH passed.

The delay was partly due to the slowness with which I had to work, even after a plan had been laid. I could only do a little at a time, and the times had to be well separated. Each day brought the moment of onslaught closer, but I dared not hurry myself. If they caught me at my work, there would be an end of all things.

But I cannot swear that my own mind did not prompt me to an unnatural slowness and caution. I was only human, and every day was one more memory.

They had all been very good to us; our friends had a party to celebrate our engagement and we were universally congratulated and all the rest of it. Yes, Kane was there too, shaking my hand and wishing me all the luck in the world. After-

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ward he went back to his work and his pilot's practice with a strange fierceness.

If at times I fell into glum abstraction, well, I had always been a little moody and Barbara could tease me out of it. Most of the times I was with her, I didn't think about the future at all.

There had been a certain deep inward coldness to her. She had carried the old wound of her losses with bitter dignity. But as the days went on, I saw less and less of it. She would even admit that individual Valgolians might be fine fellows and that the Empire had done a few constructive things for Earth. But it was more than a change of attitude. She was thawing after a long winter, she laughed more, she was wholly human now.

Human—

We sat one evening, she and I, in one of the big lounges the base had for its personnel. There were only one or two muted lights in the long quiet room, a breathing of music, snatches of whispering like our own. She sat close against me, and my lips kept straying down to brush her hair and her cheek.

"When we're married—" she said dreamily. Then all at once: "Con, what are we waiting for?"

I LOOKED at her in some surprise.

"Con, why do we assume we can't get married before the war's over?" Her voice was low and hurried, shaking just a little. "The base here has chaplains. It's less than a month now till the business starts. God knows what'll happen then. Either of us might be killed." I heard her gulp. "Con, if they killed you—"

"They won't," I said. "I'm killproof."

"No, no. We have so little time, and it may be all we'll ever have. Marry me now, darling, dearest, and at least there'll be something to remember. Whatever comes, we'll have had that while."

"I tell you," I insisted, with a sudden hideous dismay, "there's nothing to worry about. Forget it."

"Oh, I'm not asking for pity. I've more happiness now than is right. Maybe that's why I'm afraid. But, Con, they killed my father and they killed my mother and they killed Jimmy, and if they take you too, it'll be more than I can stand."

The savage woe of an old Earthly poet lanced through my brain:

The time is out of joint
O cursèd spite,
That ever I was born
To set it right!

And then, for just a moment, there came the notion of yielding. *You love the girl, Conru. You love her so much it's a pain in you. Well, take her! Marry her!*

No. I was not excessively tender of heart or conscience, but neither was I that kind of scoundrel.

I kissed her words away. After-

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ward, alone in the darkness of my room, I realized that Conrad Haugen had no good reason to hang back. It was true, all she said was true, and no other couple was waiting for an uncertain future.

It was the time for action.

I HAD been ready for days now, postponing the moment. And those days were marching to the time of war, the rebels were quivering to go, a scant few weeks at most lay between me and the ruin of Valgolian plans and work and hope.

In my steadily expanding official capacity, I could go anywhere and do almost anything in an engineering line. So, bit by bit, I had tinkered with the base's general alarm system.

We had scoutships posted, of course, but by the very nature of things they had to be close to the planet or an approaching enemy would slip between them without detection. And the substantial vibrations of a ship traveling faster than light do not arrive much ahead of the ship itself. Whatever warning we had of a hypothetical assault would be very short. It would be signaled to all of us by a siren on the intercommunications system, and after that it would be battle stations, naval units to their ships and all others to such ground defenses as we had.

But modern warfare is all to the offense. There is no way of stopping an attack from space except by meeting it and annihilating it before it gets to its destination. The rebels were counting on that fact to aid them when they struck, but it would, of course, work against them if their enemy should happen to hit first. Everyone was understandably nervous about the chance of our being discovered and assailed.

Working a little at a time, I had put a special switch in the general alarm circuit. It showed up merely as one of many on a sector call board near my room; no one was likely to notice it. And my quarters were not those originally given me. I had moved to a smaller place farther from Barbara, ostensibly to be near my work at the shipyards, actually to be near the base's ultrabeam shack.

Now it was time to act.

I needed an excuse for not going to the gun turret where I was assigned. That involved faking a serious fever, but like all Intelligence men, I had been trained to full psychosomatic integration. The same neural forces that in hysteria produce paralysis, stigmata, and other real symptoms were under my conscious control. I thought myself sick. By morning I was half delirious and my veins were on fire.

The surgeon general came to see me. "What the hell's the trouble?" he wondered. "This place is supposed to be sterile."

"Maybe it's too damn sterile," I murmured with a perfectly genuine weakness. Then, fighting the light-

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headedness that hummed and buzzed in me: "*Tsithu* fever, Doc. I'm sure that's what it is."

"Can't say I've ever heard of it."

"You'll find it in your medical books." He would, too. "It's found on the planet Sirius V, where I once visited. Filter-passing virus, transmitted by airborne spores. Not contagious here. In humans it becomes chronic; no ill effects except a few days' fever like this every few years. Now go 'way and lemme die in peace." I closed my eyes on the distorted and unreal world of sickness.

LATER Barbara came in, pale and with her hair like a rumpled halo. I had to assure her many times that I was all right and would be on my feet in two or three days. Then she smiled and sat down on the bunk and passed a cool palm over my forehead.

"Poor Con," she said. "Poor squarehead."

"I feel fine as long as you're here," I whispered.

"Don't talk," she said. "Just go to sleep." She kissed me and sat quiet. Hers was the rare gift of being a definite personality even when silent and motionless. I clasped her hand and pretended to fall into uneasy sleep. After a while she kissed me again, very softly, and went out.

I told my body to recover. It took time, hours of time, while the stub born cells retreated to a normal level of activity. I lay there thinking of many things, most of them unpleasant.

It was well into the night, the logical time to act even if the factories did go on a twenty-four hour basis.

I got up, still swaying a little with weakness, the dregs of the fever ringing in my head. After I had vomited and swallowed a stimulant tablet, I felt better. I put on my uniform, but substituted a plain service jacket without insignia of rank for the tunic. That should make me fairly inconspicuous in the confusion.

Strength came. I glanced cautiously along the dim-lit corridor, and it was empty and silent. I stole out and hurried toward the ultrabeam shack. My hidden switch was on the way; I threw it and ran on with lowered head.

The siren screamed behind me, before me, around me, the howling of all the devils in hell— *Hoo' hoo! Battle stations! Strange ships approaching! Battle stations! All hands to battle stations! Hoo-oo!*

I could imagine the pandemonium that erupted, men boiling out of factories and rooms, cursing and yelling and dashing frantically for their posts—children screaming in terror, women white-faced with sudden numbness—weapons manned, instruments sweeping the skies, spaceships roaring heavenward, incoherent yelling on the intercoms to find out who had given that signal. With luck, I would have fifteen

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minutes or half an hour of safe insanity.

A few men raced by me, on their way to the nearest missile rack. They paid me no heed, and I hurried along my own path.

The winding stair leading up to the ultrabeam shack loomed before me. I went its length, three steps at a time, bounding and gasping with my haste, up to the transmitter.

It was the tenuous link binding together a score of rebel planets, the only communication with the stars that glittered so coldly overhead. The ultrabeam does not have an infinite velocity, but it does have an unlimited speed, one depending solely on the frequency of the generating equipment, and since it only goes to such receivers as are tuned to its pattern—there must be at least one such tuned unit for the generator to work—it has a virtually infinite range. So men can talk between the stars, but are their words the wiser for that?

UP AND up and up, round and round, up and up, metal clanging underfoot and always the demon screech of the siren—up!

I sprang from the head of the stairs and crossed the areaway in one leap to the open door of the shack. There was only one operator on duty, a slim boyish figure before the glittering panel. He didn't hear me as I came behind him. I knocked him out with a calculated blow to the base of the skull. He'd be unconscious for at least fifteen minutes and that was time enough. I heaved his body out of the chair and sat down.

The unit was set for the complicated secret scrambler pattern of the Legion, one which was changed periodically just in case. I twirled the dials, adjusting for the pattern of the set I knew was kept tuned for me at Vorka's headquarters.

The set hummed, warming up. I lifted my eyes and stared into the naked face of Boreas. The shack was above ground, itself dominated by the skeletal tower of the transmitter, and a broad port revealed land and sky.

Overhead the stars were glittering, bright and hard and cruel, flashing and flashing out of the crystal dark. The peaks rose on every side, soaring dizziness of cliffs and ragged snarl of crags, hemming us in with our tiny works and struggles. It was bitterly, ringingly cold out there; the snow screamed when you walked on it; the snapping thunder of frost-split rock woke the dull roar of avalanches, and there was the wind, the old immortal wind, moaning and blowing and wandering under the stars. I saw them running, little antlike men spilling from their nest and racing across the snow before they froze. I saw the ships rise one after the other and rush darkly skyward. The base had come alive and was reaching up to defy the haughty stars.

The set buzzed and whistled,

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warming up, muttering with the cosmic interference whose source nobody knows. I began to speak into the microphone, softly and urgently: "Calling Intelligence HQ, Sol III, North America Center. Captain Halgan Conru calling North America Center. Come in, enter, come in."

THE receiver rustled with the thin dry voice of the stars. Dimly, I could hear the wind outside, snarling around the walls.

"Come in, Center. Come in, Center."

"Captain Halgan!" The voice rattled into the waiting stillness of the shack. "Captain Halgan, is it really you?"

"Get General Vorka at once," I said. "Meanwhile, are you recording? All right, be sure you get this."

I told them everything I knew. I told them what planet this was, and where we were on its surface, and what our strength and plans were. I gave them the disposition of the scoutship pickets, as far as those were known to me, and the standard Legion recognition signals. I finished with an account of the savage differences still existing between Earthman and Earthman, and Earth and its treacherous allies. And all the time I was talking to a recording machine. Nobody was listening.

When I was through, I waited a minute, not feeling any particular emotion. I was too tired. I sat there, listening to the wind and the interstellar whistling, till Vorka spoke to me.

"Halgan! Halgan, you've done it!"

"Shut up," I said. "What's coming now?"

"I checked the Fleet units. We have a Supernova with escort at Bramgar, about fifteen light-years from where you are. You are at their base, aren't you? Can you hold out for two days more?"

"I think so."

"Better get into the hills. We may have to bombard."

"Go to hell." I turned off the set.

Now to get back. They must already know it was a trick; they must be scouring the base for the saboteur. As soon as all loyal men were back, the hunt would really be on.

I had, of course, worn gloves. There would be no fingerprints. And the operator wouldn't know who had attacked him.

I changed the scrambler setting to one picked at random. And in a corner, as if it had fallen there by accident, I dropped a handkerchief stolen from Wergil of Luron. The tiny fragments of tissue which adhere to such a thing could easily be proven to be from him or one of his associates, for the basic Luronian life-molecules are all levorotatory. It might help.

I slipped back down the stairs,

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quickly and quietly. It was over. The base was as good as taken. But there was more to be done. Apart from the saving of my own life, there was still a desperate need for secrecy. For if the rebels knew what was coming, they might choose to stand and fight, or they might flee into the roadless wildernesses of space. Whichever it was, all our work and sacrifice would have gone for little.

THE provocateur policy is the boldest and most farsighted enterprise ever undertaken. It is the first attempt to make history as we choose, to control the great social forces we are only dimly beginning to understand, so that intelligence may ultimately be its own master.

Sure. Very fine and idealistic, and no doubt fairly true as well. But there is death and treachery in it, loneliness and heartbreak, and the bitterness of the betrayed. Have we the right to set ourselves up as God? Can we really say, in our omniscience, that everyone but us is wrong? There were sane, decent, intelligent folk here on Boreas, the ones we needed so desperately for all civilization. Did we have to make them our enemies, so that their grandchildren might be our friends?

I didn't know. Wherever I turned, there were treason and injustice. However hard I tried to do right, I had to wrong somebody.

I ran on, back to my cabin. I peeled off my clothes and dived into bed, and by the time they looked in on me I had worked back most of my fever.

Don't think, Conru. Don't think of this new victory and the safety of the Empire. And, perhaps, a step closer to the harshly won unity of Earth. Don't think of the way the light catches in Barbara's hair and gets turned into molten gold. You've got a fever to create, man. You've got to think yourself sick again. That ought to be easy.

VIII

BARBARA came in. She was white and still, and presently she leaned her head against my breast and cried quietly, for a long time.

"There is a spy here," she told me.

"I heard about it." I stroked her hair and held her to me, clumsily. "Do you know who it was?"

"I don't know. Somehow, they seem to think the Luronians may be guilty, but they aren't sure. They arrested them, and two were killed resisting. Colonel Wergil is in the brig now, while they decide if Luron can still be trusted."

"It can't," I said. "Earth must win alone."

"We'll win," she said dauntlessly. "With Luron or without it, we'll win." Then, like a little frightened girl, creeping close to me: "But we needed that help so much."

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I kissed her and remained silent.

The next day I got on my feet again, weak but recovered. I wandered aimlessly around the base, waiting for Barbara to get through work, listening to people talk. It was ugly, the fear and tension and wolfish watchfulness. *Whom can we trust? Who is the enemy?*

Mostly, they thought the Luronians were guilty. After all, those were the only beings on the planet who had not had to pass a rigorous investigation and psychological examination. But nobody was sure.

Levinsohn spoke over the televisor. His gaunt, lined face had grown very tired, yet there was metal in his voice. The new situation necessitated a change of plans, but the time of assault would, if anything, be moved ahead. "Be of good heart. Stand by your comrades. We'll still be free!"

I went to Barbara's apartment and we sat up very late. But even in this private record I do not wish to say what we talked about.

AND the next day the Empire came.

There was one Supernova ship with light escort, but that was enough. Such vessels have the mass of a large asteroid, and one of them can sterilize a planet; two or three can take it apart. Theoretically, a task force comprising twenty Nova-class battleships with escorts can reduce one of those monsters if it is willing to lose most of its units. But nothing less can even do significant damage, and the rebel base did not have that much. Nor could they get even what they had into full action.

The ships rushed out of interstellar space, flashing the recognition signals I had given. Before the picket vessels suspected what was wrong, the Valgolians were on them. One managed to bleat a call to base and the alarm screamed again, men rushed to battle stations. Then the Imperials blanketed all communications with a snarl of interference through which nothing the rebels had could drive.

So naturally they were thought to have been annihilated in a few swift blazes of fire and steel, a quick clean death and forgetfulness of defeat. But only the drivers were crippled, and then the Supernova yanked the vessels to its titan flanks and held them in unbreakable gravity beams. The crews would be taken later, with narcotic gas or paralyzer beams—alive.

For the Empire needs its rebels.

I knew the uselessness of going to battle stations, so I hung behind, seeking out Barbara, whose place was with the missile computer bank. I met her and Kane in the hallway. The boy's face was white, and there were tears running down his cheeks.

"This is the end," he said. "They've found us out, and there's nothing left but to die. Good by, Barbara." He kissed her, wildly, and ran for his ship. Moodily, I watched him go. He expected

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death, and he would get only capture, and afterward—

"What are you doing here, Con?" asked Barbara.

"I'm too shaky to be any good in the artillery. Let me go with you, I can punch a computer."

She nodded silently, and we went off together.

THE floor shook under us, and a crash of rock roared down the halls. The heavy weapons on the Supernova were bloodlessly reducing our ground installations and our ships not yet in action to smashed rubble. They would kill not a single one of us, except by uncontrollable accident, and save many Valgolian and Earth lives that way, but it wasn't pleasant to be slugged. The girl and I staggered ahead. When the lights went out, I stopped and held her.

"It's no use," I said. "They've got us."

"Let me go!" she cried.

I hung on, and suddenly she collapsed against me, crying and shaking. We stood there with the city rumbling and shivering around us, waiting.

Presently the Valgolian commander released the interference and contacted Levinsohn, offering terms of surrender. It seemed to Levinsohn, and it was meant to seem, that further resistance would be useless butchery. His ships were gone and his foes need only bombard him to ruin. He capitulated, and one by one we laid down our arms and filed to meet the victors.

The terms, as announced by messengers—the intercom was out of action—were generous. Leading rebels and those judged potentially "dangerous" would go to penal colonies on various Earthlike planets. Except that they weren't penal colonies at all, but, of course, the Earthlings wouldn't know this. They were indoctrination centers, and, with all my bitterness, I still longed to observe a man like Levinsohn after five years in one of the centers. He'd see things in a different perspective. He'd see the Empire for what it was—even if I sometimes had a little trouble seeing that now—and he'd be a better rebel for it.

Someday Levinsohn and his kind would be back on Earth, the new leaders ready to lead the way to a new tomorrow. And I would be with them.

I'd be back with Levinsohn and the rest, and with Barbara, too, and we'd try to pave the way to the peace and friendship. But meanwhile there'd be other revolutions—striving and hoping and breaking their hearts daring what they thought would be death to win what they called freedom and what we hoped would be evolution.

It was the fire to temper a new civilization.

We walked down the hall, Barbara and I, hand in hand, alone in spite of all the people who were

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shuffling the same way. Most of them were weeping. But Barbara's head was high now.

"What will happen to us?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said. "But, Barbara, whatever happens after this, remember that I love you. Remember that I'll always love you."

"I love you too," she smiled, and kissed me. "We'll be together, Con. That's all that matters. We'll be together."

That was important—and it made me feel good. Yes, we'd be together; I'd see to that. But for a while Barbara would hate me through all the long years of the indoctrination. Someday, perhaps, she would understand . . . the indoctrination could do it, and I could help. But by the gods of space, how would it be to take that hate all that while?

WE came out into the central chamber where the prisoners were gathering to be herded up to the ships. Armed Valgolian guards stood under the glare of improvised lights. Other Imperials were going through the city, flushing out those who might be hiding and removing whatever our armed forces could use. The equipment would do no one any good here, and Boreas would be left to its darkness.

It was cold in the vast shadowy room. The heating plant had broken down and the ancient cold of Boreas was seeping in. Barbara shivered and I held her close to me. Nat Hawkins moved over to join us, wordlessly.

I was questioned in a locked room by one of the big Valgolian officers. He looked at a stereograph in his hand and he took me aside, but it was not unusual. Many of the starbound prisoners were being questioned by their guards, and I was merely one of them.

"Colonel Halgen?" the officer asked with an eagerness close to hero-worship. He was obviously fresh from school and military terminology came from his lips as if it really meant something to a Valgolian. The colonel, of course, meant that in a titular sense I had been elevated for my work. Funny, if you use the language enough, you get to believe it yourself.

"Sir," the young officer continued, "this is one of the greatest pieces of work I've ever seen. I am to extend the official congratulations of—"

I let him talk for a while and then I raised my hand peremptorily and I told him that the girl with the Earthling Hawkins was to go along for indoctrination, despite the fact that her name did not appear on his lists. He nodded, and I went back to Barbara, but half a dozen men had come between us.

Levinsohn and five guards. The man's carriage was still erect, the old unbreakable pride and courage were still in him. Someone among the prisoners broke loose and

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rushed at him, cursing, till the Valgolians thrust him back into line.

"Levinsohn!" screamed the man. "Levinsohn, you dirty Jew, you sold us out!"

There you see why this rebellion had to be crushed. Earth still had a long way to go. The Levinsohns, the Barbaras, the more promising of the anarchs would be educated and returned and the civilizing process would go on. Earth's best and bravest would unite and fight us, and with each defeat they would learn something of what we had to teach them, that all races, however divergent, must respect each other and work together, learn it with an intensity which the merely intellectual teaching of schools and propaganda could not achieve alone —or, at any rate, soon enough.

Valgolia is the great and lonely enemy, the self-appointed Devil since none of us can be angels. It is the source of challenge and adversity such as has always driven intelligence onward and upward, in spite of itself.

Sooner or later, generations hence, perhaps, all the subject worlds will have attained internal unity, forgetting their very species in a common bond of intelligence. And on that day Valgolia's work will be done. She and her few friends, her *donagangors*, will seemingly capitulate without a fight and become simply part of a union of free and truly civilized planets.

And such a union will be firmer and more enduring than all the tyrant empires of the past. It will have the strength of a thousand or more races, working together in the harmony which they achieved in struggling against us.

THAT is the goal, but it is a long way ahead; there may be centuries needed, and meanwhile Valgolia is alone.

Barbara would understand. In time she would understand what she as yet did not even know. But first would be the hatred, the cold stark hatred that must come of knowing who and what I really am. I could only wait for that hatred to come after she learned, and then wait for it to go, slowly, slowly. . . .

Lines of the Earthlings were filing forward, and, with Nat Hawkins, Barbara waited for me. I walked to her and took her hand. Her head was high, as high as Levinsohn's. She expected all of us to die, but she'd meet the relatives and friends she thought were dead.

It would be a great, a crushing humiliation, to know one's martyrs were alive and being well treated and intensively educated by the foe, who was supporting and encouraging one's supposedly dangerous revolution.

"It won't be so bad as long as we're together, darling," I said.

She smiled, misunderstanding, and kissed me defiantly before our Valgolian guards.

—POUL ANDERSON

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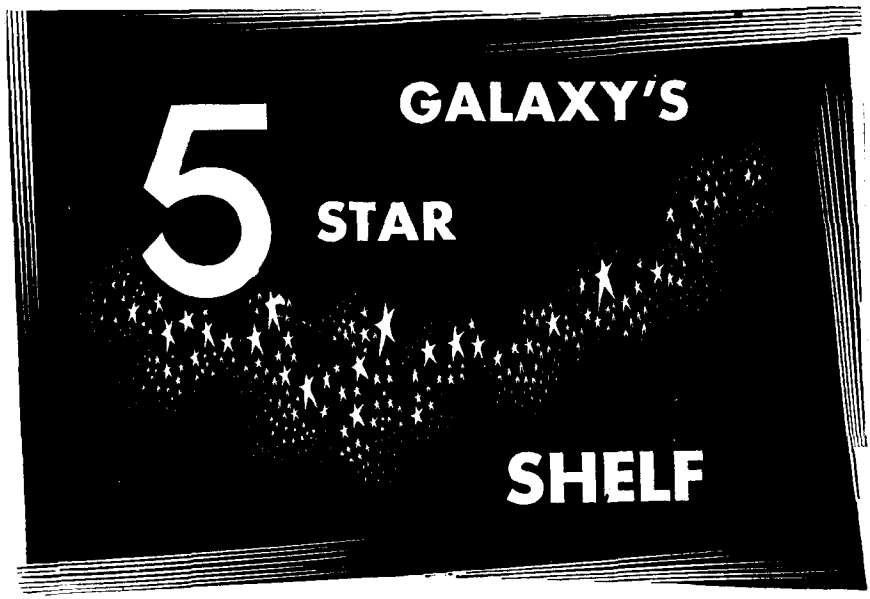

THE MOON IS HELL! by John W. Campbell, Jr. Fantasy Press, Reading, Pa., 1951. $3.00, 256 *pages.*

THIS is the big science fiction news of the month—a brand-new story by the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction,* who has not written in much too long a time.

The book is composed of two long novelets, one new, one old. The old one is *The Elder Gods,* reprinted from the October 1939 *Unknown.* This drawn-out, rather de Camplike fantasy is actually not among the best of Campbell's work.

The Moon Is Hell! is quite another kettle of fish. This brilliantly circumstantial narrative tells, in day-by-day diary form, the experiences of the first crew of explorers (all-American, of course; no foreigners allowed, not even any dubious foreign names) ever to land and live for any length of time on the Moon.

The fifteen explorer-scientists actually succeed in making a remarkably comfortable life for themselves during their first two years on the Moon's "Dark Side." They have their difficulties, to be sure, but not until well past the middle of the story do these become particularly harrowing.

Why the ship had to land on the side facing away from Earth is not reasonably established. Of course,

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there would have been no story had it landed on the visible hemisphere, since the plot revolves around the difficulties the men encounter in communicating with Earth from the far side.

The relief ship that was to take them home after their two years crashes near their encampment. Since Earth has no evidence that the explorers themselves are alive, the failure of the relief ship to return probably will persuade everyone in the United States that both expeditions failed, and no new relief ship will be sent.

The struggles of the men to get to the Earthward side and send their signals, and to piece out their food supply until a new ship can be built, make the latter half of the story exceptionally gripping.

Despite its plot-necessitated inconsistencies, *The Moon Is Hell!* is first-rate stuff, full of ingenious solutions to known lunar problems, and of the quiet heroism of men facing the unknown.

I, ROBOT, by Isaac Asimov. Gnome Press, Inc., New York, 1950. $2.50, 253 *pages.*

HERE is a continuously fascinating book. Asimov has strung together nine of his best robot stories into an episodic history of robotics' first seventy-five years. Susan Calvin, the world's first "robopsychologist," is the narrator who tells a reporter from Interplanetary Press some of the high spots in the development of these servants of man.

There is nothing particularly mechanical about the robots themselves, and certainly not about the tales describing them, for Asimov has a first-rate talent for humanizing his positronic-brained "manufactured men," and also for limning with a few brilliant lines the human characters whom the robots serve.

The book opens with a completely charming and little-known story from a 1940 issue of *Super-Science Stories,* which tells about "Robbie" the robot-nursemaid. The rest of the tales, all from *Astounding Science Fiction,* carry the story through the crisis of human opposition to robots on earth, to the final point where computer-robots make wars and other human-occasioned catastrophes impossible.

Unreservedly recommended.

JOURNEY TO INFINITY, edited by Martin Greenberg, Gnome Press, New York, 1951. $3.50, 381 *pages.*

THIS collection of twelve novelets and short stories is an attempt to present the story of mankind from ancient times into the far-distant future. It is the second volume in Gnome's "Adventures in Science Fiction" series of anthologies, the first of which was *Men Against the Stars.*

For the current collection, Greenberg has chosen tales by A. Bert-

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ram Chandler, E. E. Smith, Fredric Brown, Theodore Sturgeon, Jack Williamson, John MacDonald, Isaac Asimov, C. L. Moore, Fritz Leiber, Cleve Cartmill, Judith Merril and Eric Frank Russell. In time, these stories conduct the reader from the origins of the Adam and Eve legend, in Chandler's magnificent "False Dawn," clear through to an immensely distant future in which man has mutated into a self-controlled atomic pile, in Russell's equally superb "Metamorphosite."

Judged as a collection of science fiction stories, *Journey to Infinity* is somewhat uneven. Between the two stories which open and close the book are some which rate equally high—Sturgeon's "Unite and Conquer," for example, Asimov's "Mother Earth," and Cartmill's "Overthrow." Others are good of their kind, and a few are run-of-the-mill stuff.

However, as an "idea" anthology, the notion of presenting science fiction's possible pasts and futures for man in a collection of short stories is a fascinating one, the job cannot be effectively in twelve stories.

Anyone who is familiar with rich store of science fiction in ticular field will feel a very nse of dissatisfaction m collection. At least more tales come to ould have greatly ed the picture of man's possible pasts and futures.

Where, for example, is a chapter from the greatest of all histories of tomorrow, Robert Heinlein's? (It is possible, of course, that Heinlein would not let any be used, since his "history" is already being published in several volumes by another publisher.) Or where is the essential "Baldy" story, from Lewis Padgett's excellent post-atomic-war series? Or one of Simak's "City" tales?

Despite too skeletal a form, *Journey to Infinity* is a good buy for anyone who likes top-grade science fiction.

PRELUDE TO SPACE, by Arthur C. Clarke. Galaxy, New York, 1951. 25¢, 160 pages.

THIS genuinely effective "documentary of tomorrow," appearing for the first time anywhere as a *Galaxy* paper-bound book, tells the story of the organizational and logistics problems which must be solved before the first man-carrying rocket to the moon can be launched. Realistically, and yet with a genuine feeling for the drama and the awe of the adventure, it takes you from the early, confusion-ridden days of planning and training in London, clear through to the actual launching of the rocket from its five-mile-long track deep in the Australian desert.

Recommended for readers whose taste goes beyond Perry Mason.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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BETELGEUSE BRIDGE

By WILLIAM TENN

YOU tell them, Alvarez, old boy; you know how to talk to them. This isn't my kind of Public Relations. All I care about is that they get the pitch exactly right with all the implications and complications and everything just the way they really were.

If it hurts, well, let them yell. Just use your words and get it right. Get it all.

You can start with the day the alien spaceship landed outside Baltimore. Makes you sick to think how we never tumbled, doesn't it, Alvarez? No more than a hop, skip and a jet from the Capitol dome, and we thought it was just a lucky accident.

Explain why we thought it was so lucky. Explain about the secrecy it made possible, how the farmer who telephoned the news was placed in special and luxurious custody, how a hand-picked cordon of M. P.s paced five square miles off into an emergency military reservation a few hours later, how Congress was called into secret session and the way it was all kept out of the newspapers.

How and why Trowson, my old sociology prof, was consulted once the problem became clear. How he blinked at the brass hats and striped pants and came up with the answer.

Me. I was the answer.

How my entire staff and I were plucked out of our New York offices, where we were quietly earning a million bucks, by a flying squad of the F. B. I. and air-mailed to Baltimore. Honestly, Alvarez, even after Trowson explained the situation to me, I was still irritated. Government hush-hush always makes me uncomfortable. Though I don't have to tell you how grateful I was for it later.

The spaceship itself was such a big surprise that I didn't even wet my lips when the first of the aliens *slooshed* out. After all those years

Illustrated by JAMES VINCENT

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When interstellar guests arrive, it's only right that the treat should be on us. A treat, however, not a treatment!

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of streamlined cigar-shapes the Sunday Supplement artists had dreamed up, that colorful and rococo spheroid rearing out of a barley field in Maryland looked less like an interplanetary vessel than an oversized ornament for a whatnot table. Nothing that seemed like a rocket jet anywhere.

"And there's your job," the prof pointed. "Those two visitors."

They were standing on a flat metal plate surrounded by the highest the republic had elected or appointed. Nine feet of slimy green trunk tapering up from a rather wide base to a pointed top, and dressed in a tiny pink and white shell. Two stalks with eyes on them that swung this way and that, and seemed muscular enough to throttle a man. And a huge wet slash of a mouth that showed whenever an edge of the squirming base lifted from the metal plate.

"Snails," I said. *"Snails!"*

"Or slugs," Trowson amended. "Gastropodal molluscs in any case." He gestured at the roiling white bush of hair that sprouted from his head. "But, Dick, that vestigial bit of coiled shell is even less an evolutionary memento than this. They're an older—and smarter—race."

"Smarter?"

He nodded. "When our engineers got curious, they were very courteously invited inside to inspect the ship. They came out with their mouths hanging."

I BEGAN to get uncomfortable. I ripped a small piece off my manicure. "Well, naturally, prof, if they're so alien, so different—"

"Not only that. Superior. Get that, Dick, because it'll be very important in what you have to do. The best engineering minds that this country can assemble in a hurry are like a crowd of South Sea Islanders trying to analyze the rifle and compass from what they know of spears and windstorms. These creatures belong to a galaxy-wide civilization composed of races *at least* as advanced as they; we're a bunch of backward hicks in an unfrequented hinterland of space that's about to be opened to exploration. Exploitation, perhaps, if we can't measure up. We have to give a very good impression and we have to learn fast."

A dignified official with a briefcase detached himself from the nodding, smiling group around the aliens and started for us.

"Whew!" I commented brilliantly. "1492, repeat performance." I thought for a moment, not too clearly. "But why send the army and navy after *me?* I'm not going to be able to read blueprints from—from—"

"Betelgeuse. Ninth planet of the star Betelgeuse. No, Dick, we've already had Dr. Warbury out here. They learned English from him in two hours, although he hasn't identified a word of theirs in three days! And people like Lopez, like

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Mainzer, are going quietly psychotic trying to locate their power source. We have the best minds we can get to do the learning. Your job is different. We want you as a top-notch advertising man, a public relations executive. You're the good impression part of the program."

The official plucked at my sleeve and I shrugged him away. "Isn't that the function of government glad-handers?" I asked Trowson.

"No. Don't you remember what you said when you first saw them? *Snails!* How do you think this country is going to take to the idea of snails—giant snails—who sneer condescendingly at our skyscraper cities, our atomic bombs, our most advanced mathematics? We're a conceited kind of monkey. Also, we're afraid of the dark."

There was a gentle official tap on my shoulder. I said *"Please!"* impatiently. I watched the warm little breeze ruffle Professor Trowson's slept-in clothes and noticed the tiny red streaks in his weary eyes.

"Mighty Monsters from Outer Space. Headlines like that, prof?"

"Slugs with Superiority Complexes. *Dirty* Slugs, more likely. We're lucky they landed in this country, and so close to the Capitol, too. In a few days, we'll have to call in the heads of other nations. Then, sometime soon after, the news will be out. We don't want our visitors attacked by mobs drunk on superstition, planetary isolation or any other form of tabloid hysteria. We don't want them carrying stories back to their civilization of being shot at by a suspendered fanatic who screamed, 'Go back where you come from, you furrin seafood!' We want to give them the impression that we are a fairly amiable, fairly intelligent race, that we can be dealt with reasonably well."

I nodded. "Yeah. So they'll set up trading posts on this planet instead of garrisons. But what do I do in all this?"

He punched my chest gently. "You, Dick—you do a job of public relations. You sell these aliens to the American people!"

THE official had maneuvered around in front of me. I recognized him. He was the Undersecretary of State.

"Would you step this way, please?" he said. "I'd like to introduce you to our distinguished guests."

So he stepped, and I stepped, and we scrunched across the field and clanked across the steel plate and stood next to our gastropodic guests.

"Ahem," said the Undersecretary politely.

The nearer snail bent an eye toward us. The other eye drew a bead on the companion snail, and then the great slimy head arched and came down to our level. The creature raised, as it were, one cheek

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of its foot and said, with all the mellowness of air being pumped through a torn inner tube, "Can it be that you wish to communicate with my unworthy self, respected sir?"

I was introduced. The thing brought two eyes to bear on me. The place where its chin should have been dropped to my feet and snaked around there for a second. Then it said, "You, honored sir, are our touchstone, the link with all that is great in your noble race. Your condescension is truly a tribute."

All this tumbled out while I was muttering "How," and extending a diffident hand. The snail put one eyeball in my palm and the other on the back of my wrist. It didn't shake; it just put the things there and took them away again. I had the wit not to wipe my hands on my pants, which was my immediate impulse. The eyeball wasn't exactly dry, either.

I said, "I'll do my best. Tell me, are you—uh—ambassadors, sort of? Or maybe just explorers?"

"Our small worth justifies no titles," said the creature, "yet we are both; for all communication is ambassadorship of a kind, and any seeker after knowledge is an explorer."

I was suddenly reminded of an old story with the punchline, "Ask a foolish question and you get a foolish answer." I also wondered suddenly what snails eat.

The second alien glided over and eyed me. "You may depend upon our utmost obedience," it said humbly. "We understand your awesome function and we wish to be liked to whatever extent it is possible for your admirable race to like such miserable creatures as ourselves."

"Stick to that attitude and we'll get along," I said.

BY AND large they were a pleasure to work with. I mean there was no temperament, no upstaging, no insistence on this camera angle or that mention of a previously published book or the other wishful biographical apocrypha about being raised in a convent, like most of my other clients.

On the other hand they weren't easy to talk to. They'd take orders, sure. But ask them a question. Any question:

"How long did the trip take you?"

" 'How long' in your eloquent tongue indicates a frame of reference dealing with duration. I hesitate to discuss so complex a problem with one as learned as yourself. The velocities involved make it necessary to answer in relative terms. Our lowly and undesirable planet recedes from this beauteous system during part of its orbital period, advances toward it during part. Also we must take into consideration the direction and velocity of our star in reference to the cos-

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mic expansion of this portion of the continuum. Had we come from Cygnus, say, or Bootes, the question could be answered somewhat more directly; for those bodies travel in a contiguous arc skewed from the ecliptic plane in such a way that—"

Or a question like, "Is your government a democracy?"

"A democracy is a rule of the people, according to your rich etymology. We could not, in our lowly tongue, have expressed it so succinctly and movingly. One must govern oneself, of course. The degree of governmental control on the individual must vary from individual to individual and in the individual from time to time. This is so evident to as comprehensive a mind as yours that I trust you forgive me my inanities. The same control applies, naturally, to individuals considered in the mass. When faced with a universal necessity, the tendency exists among civilized species to unite to fill the need. Therefore, when no such necessity exists, there is less reason for concerted effort. Since this applies to all species, it applies even to such as us. On the other hand—"

See what I mean? A little of that got old quickly with me. I was happy to keep my nose to my own grindstone.

THE government gave me a month for the preparatory propaganda. Originally, the story was to break in two weeks, but I got down on my hands and knees and bawled that a publicity deadline required at least five times that. So they gave me a month.

Explain that carefully, Alvarez. I want them to understand exactly what a job I faced. All those years of lurid magazine covers showing extremely nubile females being menaced in three distinct colors by assorted monstrosities; those horror movies, those invasion-from-outer-space novels, those Sunday Supplement fright-splashes—all those sturdy psychological ruts I had to retrack. Not to mention the shudders elicited by mention of "worms," the regulation distrust of even human "furriners," the superstitious dread of creatures who had no visible place to park a soul.

Trowson helped me round up the men to write the scientific articles, and I dug up the boys who could pseudo them satisfactorily. Magazine mats were ripped apart to make way for yarns speculating gently on how far extraterrestrial races might have evolved beyond us, how much more ethical they might have become, how imaginary seven-headed creatures could still apply the Sermon on the Mount. Syndicated features popped up describing "Humble Creatures Who Create our Gardens," "Snail-Racing, the Spectacular New Spectator Sport," and so much stuff on "The Basic Unity of all Living Things" that I began to get uncomfortable at even

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a vegetarian dinner. I remember hearing there was a perceptible boom in mineral waters and vitamin pills. . . .

And all this, mind you, without a word of the real story breaking. A columnist did run a cute and cryptic item about someone having finally found meat on the flying saucers, but half an hour of earnest discussion in an abandoned fingerprint-file room prejudiced him against further comment along this line.

THE video show was the biggest problem. I don't think I could have done it on time with anything less than the resources and influence of the United States government behind me. But a week before the official announcement, I had both the video show and the comic strip in production.

I think fourteen—though maybe it was more—of the country's best comedy writers collaborated on the project, not to mention the horde of illustrators and university psychologists who combined to sweat out the delightful little drawings. We used the drawings as the basis for the puppets on the TV show and I don't think anything was ever so gimmicked up with Popular Appeal—and I do mean *Popular*—as "Andy and Dandy."

Those two fictional snails crept into the heart of America like a virus infection: overnight, everybody was talking about their anthropomorphic antics, repeating their quotable running gags and adjuring each other not to miss the next show. ("You *can't* miss it, Steve; it's on every channel anyway. Right after supper.") I had the tie-ins, too: Andy and Dandy dolls for the girls, snail scooters for the boys, everything from pictures on cocktail glasses to kitchen decalcomanias. Of course, a lot of the tie-ins didn't come off the production line till after the Big Announcement.

When we gave the handouts to the newspapers, we "suggested" what headlines to use. They had a choice of ten. Even the *New York Times* was forced to shriek "REAL ANDY AND DANDY BLOW IN FROM BETELGEUSE," and under that a four-column cut of blonde Baby Ann Joyce with the snails.

Baby Ann had been flown out from Hollywood for the photograph. The cut showed her standing between the two aliens and clutching an eye-stalk of each in her trusting, chubby hands.

The nicknames stuck. Those two slimy intellectuals from another star became even more important than the youthful evangelist who was currently being sued for bigamy.

Andy and Dandy had a ticker-tape reception in New York. They obligingly laid a cornerstone for the University of Chicago's new library. They posed for the newsreels everywhere, surrounded by

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Florida oranges, Idaho potatoes, Milwaukee beer. They were magnificently cooperative.

FROM time to time, I wondered what they thought of us. They had no facial expressions, which was scarcely odd since they had no faces. Their long eye-stalks swung this way and that as they rode down shrieking Broadway in the back seat of the Mayor's car; their gelatinous body-foot would heave periodically and the mouth under it make a smacking noise, but when the photographers suggested that they curl around the barely clad beauties, the time video rigged up a Malibu Beach show, Andy and Dandy wriggled over and complied without a word. Which is more than I can say for the barely clad beauties.

And when the winning pitcher presented them with an autographed baseball at that year's World Series, they bowed gravely, their pink shell-tops glistening in the sunlight, and said throatily into the battery of microphones: "We're the happiest fans in the universe!"

The country went wild over them.

"But we can't keep them here," Trowson predicted. "Did you read about the debate in the U. N. General Assembly yesterday? We were accused of making secret alliances with non-human aggressors against the best interests of our own species."

I shrugged. "Well, let them go overseas. I don't think anyone else will be more successful extracting information from them than we were."

Professor Trowson wriggled his short body up on a corner of his desk. He lifted a folderful of typewritten notes and grimaced as if his tongue were wrapped in wool.

"Four months of careful questioning," he grumbled. "Four months of painstaking interrogation by trained sociologists using every free moment the aliens had, which admittedly wasn't much. Four months of organized investigation, of careful data-sifting." He dropped the folder disgustedly to the desk and some of the pages splashed out. "And we know more about the social structure of Atlantis than Betelgeuse IX."

We were in the wing of the Pentagon assigned to what the brass hats, in their own cute way, had christened Project Encyclopedia. I strolled across the large, sunny office and glanced at the very latest organizational wall-chart. I pointed to a small rectangle labeled "Power Source Sub-Section" depending via a straight line from a larger rectangle marked "Alien Physical Science Inquiry Section." In the small rectangle, very finely printed, were the names of an army major, a WAC corporal, and Drs. Lopez, Vinthe and Mainzer.

"How're they doing?" I asked.

"Not much better, I'm afraid."

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Trowson turned away with a sigh from peering over my shoulder. "At least, I deduce that from the unhappy way Mainzer bubbles into his soup spoon at lunch. Conversation between sub-sections originating in different offices on the departmental level is officially discouraged, you know. But I remember Mainzer from the university cafeteria. He bubbled into his soup the very same way when he was stuck on his solar refraction engine."

"THINK Andy and Dandy are afraid we're too young to play with matches? Or maybe apelike creatures are too unpleasant-looking to be allowed to circulate in their refined and esthetic civilization?"

"I don't *know*, Dick." The prof ambled back to his desk and leafed irritably through his sociological notes. "If anything like that is true, why would they give us free run of their ship? Why would they reply so gravely and courteously to every question? If only their answers weren't so vague in our terms! But they are such complex and artistically minded creatures, so chockful of poetic sentiment and good manners that it's impossible to make mathematical or even verbal sense out of their vast and circumlocutory explanations. Sometimes, when I think of their highly polished manners and their seeming lack of interest in the structure of their society, when I put that together with their spaceship which looks like one of those tiny jade carvings that took a lifetime to accomplish . . ."

He trailed off and began riffling the pages like a Mississippi steamboat gambler going over somebody else's deck of cards.

"Isn't it possible we just don't have enough stuff as yet to understand them?"

"Yes. In fact, that's what we always come back to. Warbury points to the tremendous development in our language since the advent of technical vocabularies. He says that this process, just beginning with us, already affects our conceptual approach as well as our words. And, naturally, in a race so much further along— But if we could only find a science of theirs which bears a faint resemblance to one of ours!"

I felt sorry for him, standing there blinking futilely out of gentle, academic eyes.

"Cheer up, prof. Maybe by the time old Suckfoot and his pal come back from the Grand Tour, you'll have unsnarled a sophistry and we'll be off this 'Me, friend; you come from across sea in great bird with many wings' basis that we seemed to have wandered into."

And there you are, Alvarez: a cheap advertising smallbrain like me, and I was that close. I should have said something then. Bet you wouldn't have nodded at me heavily and said, "I hope so, Dick. I des-

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perately hope so." But, come to think of it, not only Trowson was trotting up that path. So was Warbury. So were Lopez, Vinthe and Mainzer. So was I, among others.

I HAD a chance to relax when Andy and Dandy went abroad. My job wasn't exactly over, but the Public Relations end was meshing right along, with me needed only once in a while to give a supervisory spin. Chiefly, I maintained close contact with my opposite number in various other sovereign states, giving out with experienced advice on how to sell the Boys from Betelgeuse. They had to adjust it to their own mass phobias and popular myths; but they were a little happier about it than I had been, without any clear idea of what public behavior to expect of our visitors.

Remember, when *I'd* started, I hadn't even been sure those snails were housebroken.

I followed them in the newspapers. I pasted the pictures of the Mikado receiving them next to their nice comments on the Taj Mahal. They weren't nearly so nice to the Akhund of Swat; but, then, when you think of what the Akhund said about them—

They tended to do that everywhere, giving just a little better than they got. For example, when they were presented with those newly created decorations in Red Square (Dandy got The Order of Extraterrestrial Friends of Soviet Labor, while, for some abstruse reason, The Order of Heroic Interstellar Champion of the Soviet People was conferred upon Andy), they came out with a long, ringing speech about the scientific validity of communist government. It made for cheering, flower-tossing crowds in the Ukraine and Poland, but a certain amount of restiveness in these United States.

But before I had to run my staff into overtime hours, whipping up press releases which recapitulated the aliens' statement before the joint houses of Congress and their lovely, sentimental comments at Valley Forge, the aliens were in Berne, telling the Swiss that only free enterprise could have produced the yodel, the Incabloc escapement in watches, and such a superb example of liberty; hadn't they had democracy long enough to have had it first, and wasn't it wonderful?

By the time they reached Paris, I had the national affection pretty much under control again, although here and there a tabloid still muttered peevishly in its late city final. But, as always, Andy and Dandy put the clincher on. Even then I wondered whether they really liked DeRoges' latest abstraction for itself alone.

But they bought the twisted sculpture, paying for it, since they had no cash of their own, with a thumb-sized gadget which actually melted marble to any degree of

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pattern-delicacy the artist desired, merely by being touched to the appropriate surface. DeRoges threw away his chisels blissfully, but six of the finest minds in France retired to intensive nervous breakdowns after a week of trying to solve the tool's working principles.

It went over big here:

ANDY AND DANDY PAY AS THEY GO

Betelgeuse Business Men Show Appreciation for Value Received

This newspaper notes with pleasure the sound shopper's ethics behind the latest transaction of our distinguished guests from the elemental void. Understanding the inexorable law of supply and demand, these representatives of an advanced economic system refuse to succumb to the 'gimmies.' If certain other members of the human race were to examine carefully the true implications of . . .

SO WHEN they returned to the United States after being presented at the British Court, they got juicy spreads in all the newspapers, a tug-whistle reception in New York harbor and the mayor's very chiefest deputy there on City Hall steps to receive them.

And even though people were more or less accustomed to them now, they were somehow never shoved off page one. There was the time a certain furniture polish got a testimonial out of them in which the aliens announced that they'd had particularly happy and glossy results on their tiny shell toppers with the goo; and they used the large financial rewards of the testimonial to buy ten extremely rare orchids and have them sunk in plastic. And there was the time—

I missed the television show on which it broke. I had gone to a sidestreet movie theater that night to see a revival of one of my favorite Chaplin pictures; and I'd never enjoyed the ostentatious greet-the-great hysterics of *Celebrity Salon* anyway. I hadn't any idea of how long the m.c., Bill Bancroft, had waited to get Andy and Dandy on his program, and how much he was determined to make it count when the big night arrived.

Reconstructed and stripped of meaningless effusion, it went something like this:

Bancroft asked them if they weren't anxious to get home to the wife and kiddies. Andy explained patiently, for perhaps the thirty-fourth time, that, since they were hermaphrodites, they had no family in any humanly acceptable sense. Bancroft cut into the explanation to ask them what ties they *did* have. Chiefly the revitalizer, says Andy politely.

Revitalizer? What's a revitalizer? Oh, a machine they have to expose themselves to every decade or so,

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says Dandy. There's at least one revitalizer in every large city on their home planet.

Bancroft makes a bad pun, waits for the uproarious audience to regain control, then asks: And this revitalizer—just what does it do? Andy goes into a long-winded explanation, the gist of which is that the revitalizers stir up cytoplasm in all animal cells and refresh them.

I see, cracks Bancroft; the pause every decade that refreshes. And then, after being refreshed, you have what as a result? "Oh," muses Dandy, "you might say we have no fear of cancer or any degenerative disease. Besides that, by exposing ourselves to revitalizers at regular intervals throughout our lifetime and refreshing our body cells, we quintuple our life expectancy. We live five times longer than we should. That's about what the revitalizer does, you might say," says Dandy. Andy, after thinking a bit, agrees. "That's about it."

Pandemonium, and not mild. Newspaper extras in all languages, including the Scandinavian. Lights burning late at night in the U. N. Headquarters with guards twenty deep around the site.

When President of the Assembly Sadhu asked them why they'd never mentioned revitalizers before, they did the snail equivalent of shrugging and said the Betelgeuse IX equivalent of nobody ever asked them.

President Sadhu cleared his throat, waved all complications aside with his long brown fingers and announced, "That is not important. Not now. We must have revitalizers."

It seemed to take the aliens a while to understand that. When they finally became convinced that we, as a species, were utterly entranced with the prospect of two to four centuries of life instead of fifty or sixty years, they went into a huddle.

BUT their race didn't make these machines for export, they explained regretfully. Just enough to service their population. And, while they *could* see as how we might like and must obviously deserve to have these gadgets, there was none to ferry back from Betelgeuse.

Sadhu didn't even look around for advice. "What would your people want?" he asked. "What would they like in exchange for manufacturing these machines for us? We will pay almost any price within the power of this entire planet." A rumbling, eager "yes" in several languages rolled across the floor of the Assembly.

Andy and Dandy couldn't think of a thing. Sadhu begged them to try. He personally escorted them to their spaceship, which was now parked in a restricted area in Central Park. "Good night, gentlemen," said President of the Assembly Sadhu. "Try—please try hard to think of an exchange."

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They stayed inside their ship for almost six days while the world almost went insane with impatience. When I think of all the fingernails bitten that week by two billion people . . .

"Imagine!" Trowson whispered to me. He was pacing the floor as if he fully intended to walk all the way to Betelgeuse. "We'd just be children on a quintupled life-scale, Dick. All my achievement and education, all yours, would be just the beginning! A man could learn five professions in such a life—and think what he could accomplish in one!"

I nodded, a little numb. I was thinking of the books I could read, the books I might write, if the bulk of my life stretched ahead of me and the advertising profession was just a passing phase in the beginning of it. Then, again, somehow I'd never married, never had had a family. Not enough free time, I had felt. And now, at forty, I was too set in my ways. But a man can unset a lot in a century—

In six days the aliens came out. With a statement of price.

They believed they could persuade their people to manufacture a supply of revitalizers for us if . . . An IF writ very large indeed.

Their planet was woefully short of radioactive minerals, they explained apologetically. Barren worlds containing radium, uranium and thorium had been discovered and claimed by other races, but the folk of Betelgeuse IX were forbidden by their ethics to wage aggressive war for territorial purposes. We had plenty of radioactive ore, which we used chiefly for war and biological research. The former was patently undesirable and the latter would be rendered largely unnecessary by the revitalizers.

So, in exchange, they wanted our radioactive elements. All of them, they stated humbly.

ALL right, we were a little surprised, even stunned. But the protests never *started* to materialize. There was an overwhelming chorus of "sold!" from every quadrant of the globe. A couple of generals here, a few militaristic statesmen there managed to raise direly pointing forefingers before they were whisked out of position. A nuclear physicist or two howled about the future of sub-atomic research, but the peoples of the earth howled louder.

"Research? How much research can you do in a lifetime of three hundred years?"

Overnight, the United Nations became the central office of a planet-wide mining concession. National boundaries were superseded by pitchblende deposits and swords were beaten into pickaxes. Practically anyone with a good, usable arm enlisted in the shovel brigades for two or more months out of the year. Camaraderie flew on the winds of the world.

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Andy and Dandy politely offered to help. They marked out on detail contour maps the spots to be mined, and that included areas never suspected of radioactivity. They supplied us with fantastic but clear line-drawings of devices for extracting the stuff from the ores in which it assayed poorly, and taught us the exact use of these devices, if not their basic principle.

They hadn't been joking. They wanted it all.

Then, when everything was running smoothly, they buzzed off for Betelgeuse to handle their part of the bargain.

THOSE two years were the most exhilarating of my life. And I'd say everyone feels the same, don't they, Alvarez? The knowledge that the world was working together, cheerfully, happily, for life itself. I put *my* year in at The Great Slave Lake and I don't think anyone of my age and weight lifted more pitchblende.

Andy and Dandy came back in two huge ships, manned by weird snail-like robots. The robots did everything, while Andy and Dandy went on being lionized. From the two ships, almost covering the sky, the robots ferried back and forth in strange, spiral aircraft, bringing revitalizers down, carrying refined radioactive elements aloft. No one paid the slightest attention to their methods of instantaneous extraction from large quantities of ore: we were interested in just one throbbing thought—the revitalizers.

They worked. And that, so far as most of us were concerned, was that.

The revitalizers *worked*. Cancer disappeared; heart disease and kidney disease immediately arrested. Insects which were introduced into the square one-story lab structures lived for a year instead of a few months. And humans—doctors shook their heads in wonder over people who had gone through.

All over the planet, near every major city, the long, patient, slowly moving lines stood outside the revitalizers, which were rapidly becoming something else.

"Temples!" shouted Mainzer. "They look on them as temples. A scientist investigating their operation is treated like a dangerous lunatic in a nursery by the attendants. Not that a man can find a clue in those ridiculously small motors. I no longer ask what their power source can be—instead, I ask if they have a power source *at all!*"

"The revitalizers are very precious now, in the beginning," Trowson soothed him. "After a while, the novelty will wear off and you'll be able to investigate at your leisure. Could it be solar power?"

"No!" Mainzer shook his huge head positively. "Not solar power —solar power I am sure I could recognize. As I am sure that the power supply of their ships and whatever runs these—these revital-

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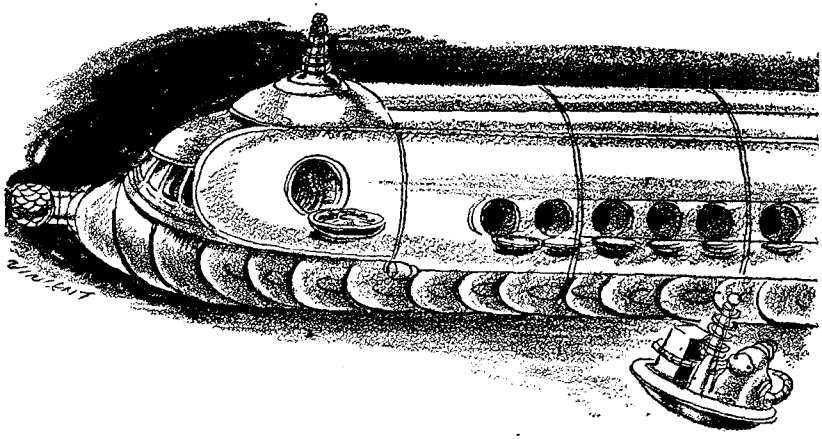

izers are two entirely separate things. On the ships I have given up. But the revitalizers I believe I could solve. If only they would let me examine them. Fools! So terribly afraid I might damage one, and they would have to travel to another city for their elixir!"

We patted his shoulder, but we weren't really interested. Andy and Dandy left that week, after wishing us well in their own courteous and complex fashion. Whole population groups blew kisses at their mineral-laden ships.

Six months after they left, the revitalizers stopped.

"AM I CERTAIN? Trowson snorted at my dismayed face. "One set of statistics proves it: look at your death rate. It's back to pre-Betelgeuse normal. Or ask any doctor. Any doctor who can forget his U. N. security oath, that is. There'll be really wild riots when the news breaks, Dick."

"But *why?*" I asked him. "Did we do something wrong?"

He started a laugh that ended with his teeth clicking frightenedly together. He rose and walked to the window, staring out into the star-diseased sky. "We did something wrong, all right. We trusted. We made the same mistake all natives have made when they met a superior civilization. Mainzer and Lopez have taken one of the revitalizer engine units apart. There was just a trace of it left, but this time they found the power source. Dick, my boy, the revitalizers were run on the fuel of completely pure radioactive elements!"

I needed a few moments to file that properly. Then I sat down in the easy chair very, very carefully. I made some hoarse, improbable sounds before croaking: "Prof, do

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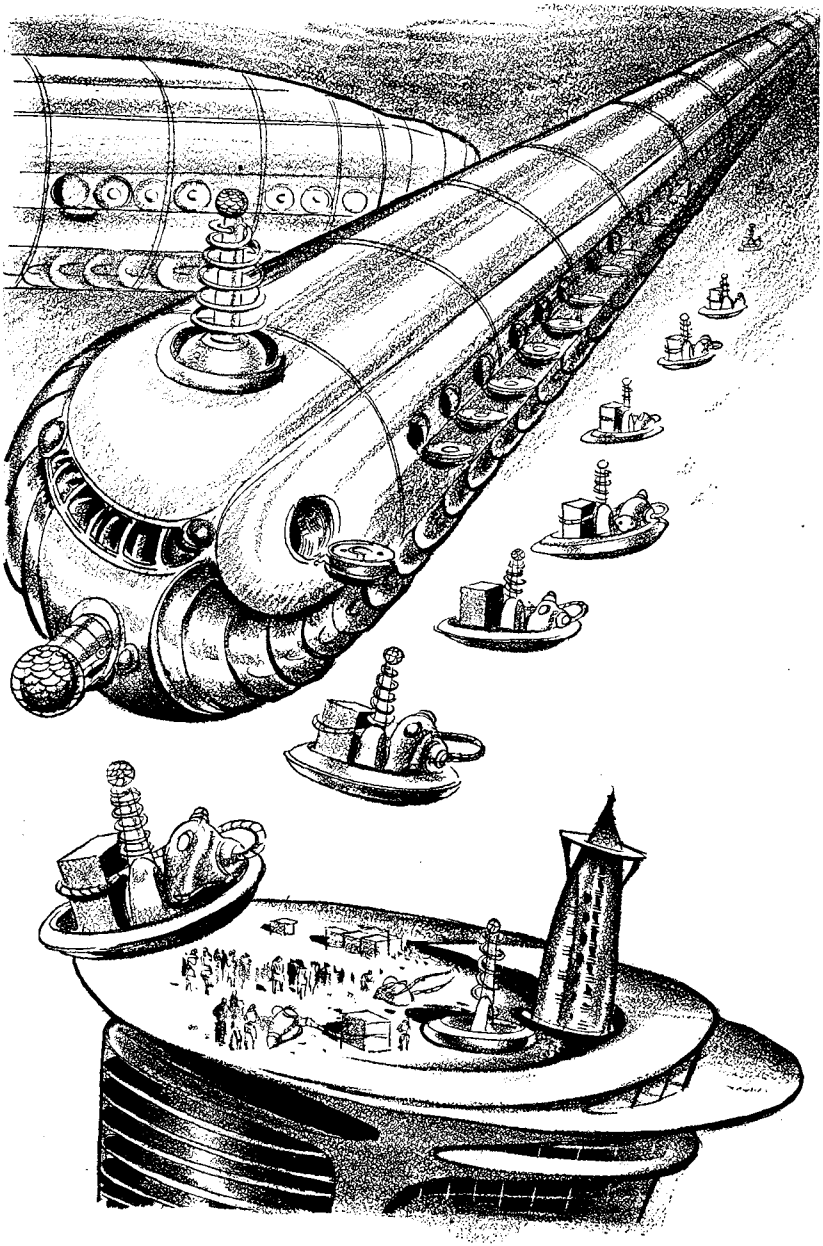

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you mean they wanted that stuff for themselves, for their *own* revitalizers? That everything they did on this planet was carefully planned so that they could con us with a maximum of friendliness all around? It doesn't seem—it just can't—why, with their superior science, they could have conquered us if they'd cared to. They could have—"

"No, they couldn't have," Trowson whipped out. He turned to face me and flung his arms across each other. "They're a decadent, dying race; they wouldn't have attempted to conquer us. Not because of their ethics—this huge, horrible swindle serves to illustrate *that* aspect of them—but because they haven't the energy, the concentration, the interest. Andy and Dandy are probably representative of the few remaining who have barely enough git-up-and-go to *trick* backward peoples out of the all-important, life-sustaining revitalizer fuel."

The implications were just beginning to soak in my cortex. Me, the guy who did the most complete and colossal public relations job of all time—I could just see what my relations with the public would be like if I was ever connected with this shambles.

"And without atomic power, prof, we won't have space travel!"

He gestured bitterly. "Oh, we've been taken, Dick; the whole human race has been had. I know what you're going through, but think of me! I'm the failure, the man responsible. I'm supposed to be a sociologist! How could I have missed? *How?* It was all there: the lack of interest in their own culture, the overintellectualization of esthetics, the involved methods of thought and expression, the exaggerated etiquette, even the very first thing of theirs we saw—their ship—was too heavily stylized and intricately designed for a young, thrusting civilization.

"They *had* to be decadent; every sign pointed to that conclusion. And, of course, the fact that they resort to the methods of fueling their revitalizers that we've experienced—when if we had their science, what might we not do, what substitutes might we not develop! No wonder they couldn't explain their science to us; I doubt if they understand it fully themselves. They are the profligate, inadequate and sneak-thief heirs of what was once a soaring race!"

I WAS following my own unhappy images. "And we're still hicks. Hicks who've been sold the equivalent of the Brooklyn Bridge by some dressed-up sharpies from Betelgeuse."

Trowson nodded. "Or a bunch of poor natives who have sold their island home to a group of European explorers for a handful of brightly colored glass beads."

But of course we were both wrong, Alvarez. Neither Trowson

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nor I had figured on Mainzer or Lopez or the others. Like Mainzer said, a few years earlier and we would have been licked. But Man had entered the atomic age sometime before 1945 and people like Mainzer and Vinthe had done nuclear research back in the days when radioactive elements abounded on Earth. We had that and we had such tools as the cyclotron, the betatron. And, if our present company will pardon the expression, Alvarez, we are a young and vigorous race.

All we had to do was the necessary research.

The research was done. With a truly effective world government, with a population not only interested in the problem, but recently experienced in working together—and with the grim incentive we had, Alvarez—the problem, as you know, was solved.

We developed artificial radioactives and refueled the revitalizers. We developed atomic fuels out of the artificial radioactives and we got space travel. We did it comparatively fast, and we weren't interested in a ship that just went to the Moon or Mars. We wanted a star ship. And we wanted it so bad, so fast, that we have it now, too.

Here we are. Explain the situation to them, Alvarez, just the way I told it to you, but with all the knee-bending and gobbledegook that a transplanted Brazilian with twelve years Oriental trading experience can put into it. You're the man to do it—I can't talk like that. It's the only language those decadent slugs understand, so it's the only way we can talk to them. So talk to them, these slimy snails, these oysters on the quarter shell, these smart-alecky slugs. Don't forget to mention to them that the supply of radioactives they got from us won't last forever. Get that down in fine detail.

Then stress the fact that we've got artificial radioactives, and that they've got some things we know we want and lots of other things we mean to find out about.

Tell them, Alvarez, that we've come to collect tolls on that Brooklyn Bridge they sold us.

—WILLIAM TENN

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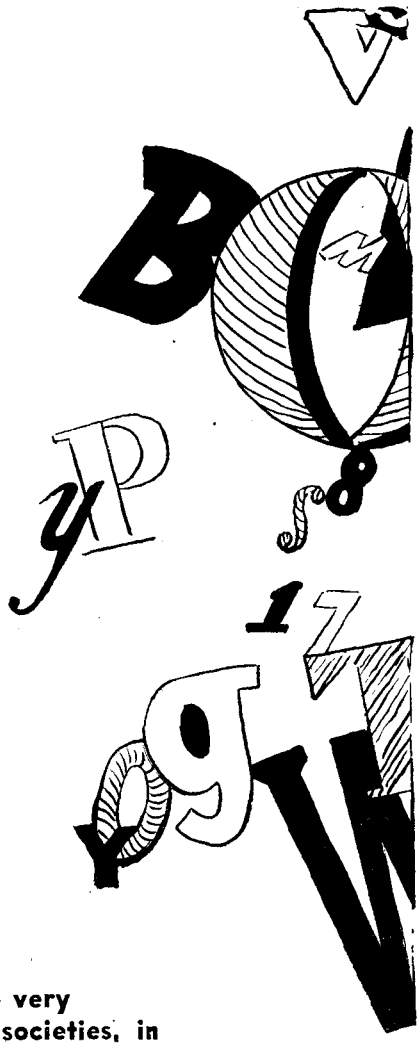
I, the Unspeakable

By WALT SHELDON



I FOUGHT to be awake. I was dreaming, but I think I must have blushed. I must have blushed in my sleep.

"Do it!" she said. *"Please do it! For me!"*

It was the voice that always came, low, intense, seductive, the sound of your hand on silk . . . and to a citizen of Northem, a conformist, it was shocking. I was a conformist then; I was still one that morning.

I awoke. The glowlight was on, slowly increasing. I was in my living machine in Center Four, where I belonged, and all the familiar things were about me, reality was back, but I was breathing very hard.

I lay on the pneumo a while before getting up. I looked at the chroner: 0703 hours, Day 17,

"What's in a name?" might be very dangerous to ask in certain societies, in which sticks and stones are *also* a big problem!

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Illustrated by LOUIS MARCHETTI

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Month IX, New Century Three. My morning nuro-tablets had already popped from the tube, and the timer had begun to boil an egg. The egg was there because the realfood allotment had been increased last month. The balance of trade with Southem had just swung a decimal or two our way.

I rose finally, stepped to the mirror, switched it to positive and looked at myself. New wrinkles—or maybe just a deepening of the old ones. It was beginning to show; the past two years were leaving traces.

I hadn't worried about my appearance when I'd been with the Office of Weapons. There, I'd been able to keep pretty much to myself, doing research on magnetic mechanics as applied to space drive. But other jobs, where you had to be among people, might be different. I needed every possible thing in my favor.

Yes, I still hoped for a job, even after two years. I still meant to keep on plugging, making the rounds.

I'd go out again today.

The timer clicked and my egg was ready. I swallowed the tablets and then took the egg to the table to savor it and make it last.

As I leaned forward to sit, the metal tag dangled from my neck, catching the glowlight. My identity tag.

Everything came back in a rush—

My name. The dream and *her* voice. And her suggestion.

Would I dare? Would I start out this very morning and take the risk, the terrible risk?

YOU remember renumbering. Two years ago. You remember how it was then; how everybody looked forward to his new designation, and how everybody made jokes about the way the letters came out, and how all the records were for a while fouled up beyond recognition.

The telecomics kidded renumbering. One went a little too far and they psycho-scanned him and then sent him to Marscol as a dangerous nonconform.

If you were disappointed with your new designation, you didn't complain. You didn't want a sudden visit from the Deacons during the night.

There had to be renumbering. We all understood that. With the population of Northem already past two billion, the old designations were too clumsy. Renumbering was efficient. It contributed to the good of Northem. It helped advance the warless struggle with Southem.

The equator is the boundary. I understand that once there was a political difference and that the two superstates sprawled longitudinally, not latitudinally, over the globe. Now they are pretty much the same. There is the truce, and they are both geared for war. They are

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both efficient states, as tightly controlled as an experiment with enzymes, as microsurgery, as the temper of a diplomat.

We were renumbered, then, in Northem. You know the system: everybody now has six digits and an additional prefix or suffix of four letters. Stateleader, for instance, has the designation AAAA-111/111. Now, to address somebody by calling off four letters is a little clumsy. We try to pronounce them when they are pronounceable. That is, no one says to Stateleader, "Good morning, A-A-A-A." They say, "Good morning, Aaaa."

Reading the last quote, I notice a curious effect. It says what I feel. Of course I didn't feel that way on that particular morning. I was still conformal; the last thing in my mind was that I would infract and be psycho-scanned.

Four letters then, and in many cases a pronounceable four letter word.

A four letter word.

Yes, you suspect already. You know what a four letter word can be.

Mine was.

It was unspeakable.

The slight weight on my forehead reminded me that I still wore my sleep-learner. I'd been studying administrative cybernetics, hoping to qualify in that field, although it was a poor substitute for a space drive expert. I removed the band and stepped across the room and turned off the oscillator. I went back to my egg and my bitter memories.

I will never forget the first day I received my new four letter combination and reported it to my chief, as required. I was unthinkably embarrassed. He didn't say anything. He just swallowed and choked and became crimson when he saw it. He didn't dare pass it to his secretarial engineer; he went to the administrative circuits and registered it himself.

I can't blame him for easing me out. He was trying to run an efficient organization, after all, and no doubt I upset its efficiency. My work was important—magnetic mechanics was the only way to handle quanta reaction, or the so-called non-energy drive, and was therefore the answer to feasible space travel beyond our present limit of Mars—and there were frequent inspection tours by Big Wheels and Very Important Persons.

Whenever anyone, especially a woman, asked my name, the embarrassment would become a crackling electric field all about us. The best tactic was just not to answer.

THE chief called me in one day. He looked haggard.

"Er—old man," he said, not quite able to bring himself to utter my name, "I'm going to have to switch you to another department. How would you like to work on nutrition kits? Very interesting work."

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"Nutrition kits? *Me?* On nutrition kits?"

"Well, I—er—know it sounds unusual, but it justifies. I just had the cybs work it over in the light of present regulations, and it justifies."

Everything had to justify, of course. Every act in the monthly report had to be covered by regulations and cross-regulations. Of course there were so many regulations that if you just took the time to work it out, you could justify damn near anything. I knew what the chief was up to. Just to remove me from my post would have taken a year of applications and hearings and innumerable visits to the capital in Center One. But if I should infract—deliberately infract—it would enable the chief to let me go. The equivalent of resigning.

"I'll infract," I said. "Rather than go on nutrition kits, I'll infract."

He looked vastly relieved. "Uh—fine," he said. "I rather hoped you would."

It took a week or so. Then I was on Non-Productive status and issued an N/P book for my necessities. Very few luxury coupons in the N/P book. I didn't really mind at first. My new living machine was smaller, but basically comfortable, and since I was still a loyal member of the state and a verified conformist, I wouldn't starve.

But I didn't know what I was in for.

I went from bureau to bureau, office to office, department to department—any place where they might use a space drive expert. A pattern began to emerge; the same story everywhere. When I mentioned my specialty they would look delighted. When I handed them my tag and they saw my name, they would go into immediate polite confusion. As soon as they recovered they would say they'd call me if anything turned up . . .

A FEW weeks of this and I became a bit dazed.

And then there was the problem of everyday existence. You might say it's lucky to be an N/P for a while. I've heard people say that. Basic needs provided, worlds of leisure time; on the surface it sounds attractive.

But let me give you an example. Say it is monthly realfood day. You go to the store, your mouth already watering in anticipation. You take your place in line and wait for your package. The distributor takes your coupon book and is all ready to reach for your package—and then he sees the fatal letters N/P. Non-Producer. A drone, a drain upon the State. You can see his stare curdle. He scowls at the book again.

"Not sure this is in order. Better go to the end of the line. We'll check it later."

You know what happens before the end of the line reaches the counter. No more packages.

Well, I couldn't get myself off N/P status until I got a post,

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and with my name I *couldn't* get a post.

Nor could I change my name. You know what happens when you try to change something already on the records. The very idea of wanting change implies criticism of the State. Unthinkable behavior.

That was why this curious dream voice shocked me so. The thing that it suggested was quite as embarrassing as its non-standard, emotional, provocative tone.

Bear with me; I'm getting to the voice—to *her*—in a moment.

I want to tell you first about the loneliness, the terrible loneliness. I could hardly join group games at any of the rec centers. I could join no special interest clubs or even State Loyalty chapters. Although I dabbled with theoretical research in my own quarters, I could scarcely submit any findings for publication —not with my name attached. A pseudonym would have been non-regulation and illegal.

But there was the worst thing of all. I could not mate.

FUNNY, I hadn't thought about mating until it became impossible. I remember the first time, out of sheer idleness, I wandered into a Eugenic Center. I filled out my form very carefully and submitted it for analysis and assignment. The clerk saw my name, and did the usual double-take. He coughed and swallowed and fidgeted.

He said, "Of course you understand that we must submit your application to the woman authorized to spend time in the mating booths with you, and that she has the right to refuse."

"Yes, I understand that."

"M'm," he said, and dismissed me with a nod.

I waited for a call in the next few weeks, still hoping, but I knew no woman would consent to meet a man with my name, let alone enter a mating booth with him.

The urge to reproduce myself became unbearable. I concocted all sorts of wild schemes.

I might infract socially and be classified a nonconform and sent to Marscol. I'd heard rumors that in that desolate land, on that desolate planet, both mingling and mating were rather disgustingly unrestricted. Casual mating would be terribly dangerous, of course, with all the wild irradiated genes from the atomic decade still around, but I felt I'd be willing to risk that. Well, almost . . .

About then I began to have these dreams. As I've told you, in the dream there was only this woman's seductive voice. The first time I heard it I awoke in a warm sweat and swore something had gone wrong with the sleep-learner. You never hear the actual words with this machine, of course; you simply absorb the concepts unconsciously. Still, it seemed an explanation. I checked thoroughly. Nothing wrong.

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The next night I heard the woman's voice again.

"Try it," she said. *"Do it. Start tomorrow to get your name changed. There will be a way. There must be a way. The rules are so mixed up that a clever man can do almost anything. Do it, please—for me."*

SHE was not only trying to get me to commit nonconformity, but making heretical remarks besides. I awoke that time and half-expected a Deacon to pop out of the tube and turn his electric club upon me.

And I heard the voice nearly every night.

It hammered away.

"What if you do fail? Almost anything would be better than the miserable existence you're leading now!"

One morning I even caught myself wondering just how I'd go about this idea of hers. Wondering what the first step might be.

She seemed to read my thoughts. That night she said, *"Consult the cybs in the Govpub office. If you look hard enough and long enough, you'll find a way."*

Now, on this morning of the seventeenth day in the ninth month, I ate my boiled egg slowly and actually toyed with the idea. I thought of being on productive status again. I had almost lost my fanatical craving to be useful to the State, but I did want to be busy—desperately. I didn't want to be despised any more. I didn't want to be lonely. I wanted to reproduce myself.

I made my decision suddenly. Waves of emotion carried me along. I got up, crossed the room to the directory, and pushbuttoned to find the location of the nearest Govpub office.

I didn't know what would happen and almost didn't care.

II

LIKE most important places, the Govpub Office in Center Four was underground. I could have taken a tunnelcar more quickly, but it seemed pleasanter to travel topside. Or maybe I just wanted to put this off a bit. Think about it. Compose myself.

At the entrance to the Govpub warren there was a big director cyb, a plate with a speaker and switch. The sign on it said to switch it on and get close to the speaker and I did.

The cyb's mechanical voice—they never seem to get the "th" sounds right—said, "This is Branch Four of the Office of Government Publications. Say, 'Publications,' and/or, 'Information desired,' as thoroughly and concisely as possible. Use approved voice and standard phraseology."

Well, simple enough so far. I had always rather prided myself on my knack for approved voice, those flat, emotionless tones that indicate efficiency. And I would never forget

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how to speak Statese. I said, "Applicant desires all pertinent information relative assignment, change or amendment of State Serial designations, otherwise generally referred to as nomenclature."

There was a second's delay while the audio patterns tripped relays and brought the memory tubes in.

Then the cyb said, "Proceed to Numbering and Identity section. Consult alphabetical list and diagram on your left for location of same."

"Thanks," I said absent-mindedly.

I started to turn away and the cyb said, "Information on tanks is military information and classified. State authorization for—"

I switched it off.

NUMBERING and Identity wasn't hard to find. I took the shaft to the proper level and then it was only a walk of a few hundred yards through the glowlit corridors.

N. & I. turned out to be a big room, somewhat circular, very high-ceilinged, with banks of cyb controls covering the upper walls. Narrow passageways, like spokes, led off in several directions. There was an information desk in the center of the room.

I looked that way and my heart went into free fall.

There was a girl at the information desk. An exceptionally attractive girl. She was well within the limits of acceptable standard, and her features were even enough, and her hair a middle blonde—but she had something else. Hard to describe. It was a warmth, a buoyancy, a sense of life and intense animation. It didn't exactly show; it radiated. It seemed to sing out from her clear complexion, from her figure, which even a tunic could not hide, from everything about her.

And if I were to state my business, I would have to tell her my name.

I almost backed out right then. I stopped momentarily. And then common sense took hold and I realized that if I were to go through with this thing, here would be only the first of a long series of embarrassments and discomforts. It had to be done.

I walked up to the desk and the girl turned to face me, and I could have sworn that a faint smile crossed her lips. It was swift, like the shadow of a bird across one of the lawns in one of the great parks topside. Very non-standard. Yet I wasn't offended; if anything, I felt suddenly and disturbingly pleased.

"What information is desired?" she asked. Her voice was standard—or was it?

Again I had the feeling of restrained warmth.

I used colloquial. "I want to get the dope on State Serial designations, how they're assigned and so forth. Especially how they might be changed."

She put a handsteno on the desk

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top and said, "Name? Address? Post?"

I froze. I stood there and stared at her.

She looked up and said, "Well?"

"I—er—no post at present. N/P status."

Her fingers moved on the steno.

I gave her my address and she recorded that.

Then I paused again.

She said, "And your name?"

I took a deep breath and told her.

I didn't want to look into her eyes. I wanted to look away, but I couldn't find a decent excuse to. I saw her eyes become wide and noticed for the first time that they were a warm gray, almost a mouse color. I felt like laughing at that irrelevant observation, but more than that I felt like turning and running. I felt like climbing and dashing all over the walls like a frustrated cat and yelling at the top of my lungs. I felt like anything but standing there and looking stupid, meeting her stare—

SHE looked down quickly and recorded my name. It took her a little longer than necessary. In that time she recovered. Somewhat.

"All right," she said finally, "I'll make a search."

She turned to a row of buttons on a console in the center of the desk and began to press them in various combinations. A typer clicked away. She tore off a slip of paper, consulted it, and said, "Information desired is in Bank 29. Please follow me."

Well, following her was a pleasure, anyway. I could watch the movement of her hips and torso as she walked. She was not tall, but long-legged and extremely lithe. Graceful and rhythmic. Very, very feminine, almost beyond standard in that respect. I felt blood throb in my temples and was heartily ashamed of myself.

I would like to be in a mating booth with her, I thought, the full authorized twenty minutes. And I knew I was unconformist and the realization hardly scared me at all.

She led me down one of the long passageways.

A few moments later I said, "Don't you sometimes get—well, pretty lonely working here?" Personal talk at a time like this wasn't approved behavior, but I couldn't help it.

She answered hesitantly, but at least she answered. She said, "Not terribly. The cybs are company enough most of the time."

"You don't get many visitors, then."

"Not right here. N. & I. isn't a very popular section. Most people who come to Govpub spend their time researching in the ancient manuscript room. The—er—social habits of the pre-atomic civilization."

I laughed. I knew what she meant, all right. Pre-atomics and their ideas about free mating always fascinated people. I moved up be-

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side her. "What's your name, by the way?"

"L-A-R-A 339/827."

I pronounced it. "Lara. Lah-rah. That's beautiful. Fits you, too."

SHE didn't answer; she kept her eyes straight ahead and I saw the faint spot of color on her cheek.

I had a sudden impulse to ask her to meet me after hours at one of the rec centers. If it had been my danger alone, I might have, but I couldn't very well ask her to risk discovery of a haphazard, unauthorized arrangement like that and the possibility of going to the psychoscan.

We came to a turn in the corridor and something happened; I'm not sure just how it happened. I keep telling myself that my movements were not actually deliberate. I was to the right of her. The turn was to the left. She turned quickly, and I didn't, so that I bumped into her, knocking her off balance. I grabbed her to keep her from falling.

For a moment we stood there, face to face, touching each other lightly. I held her by the arms. I felt the primitive warmth of her breath. Our eyes held together . . . proton . . . electron . . . I felt her tremble.

She broke from my grip suddenly and started off again.

After that she was very businesslike.

We came finally to the controls of Bank 29 and she stood before them and began to press button combinations. I watched her work; I watched her move. I had almost forgotten why I'd come here. The lights blinked on and off and the typers clacked softly as the machine sorted out information.

She had a long printed sheet from the roll presently. She frowned at it and turned to me. "You can take this along and study it," she said, "but I'm afraid what you have in mind may be—a little difficult."

She must have guessed what I had in mind. I said, "I didn't think it would be easy."

"It seems that the only agency authorized to change a State Serial under any circumstances is Opsych."

"Opsych?" You can't keep up with all these departments.

"The Office of Psychological Adjustment. They can change you if you go from a lower to higher E.A.C."

"I don't get it, exactly."

As she spoke I had the idea that there was sympathy in her voice. Just an overtone. "Well," she said, "as you know, the post a person is qualified to hold often depends largely on his Emotional Adjustment Category. Now if he improves and passes from, let us say, Grade 3 to Grade 4, he will probably change his place of work. In order to protect him from any associative maladjustments developed under the old E.A.C., he is permitted a new number."

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I groaned. "But I'm already in the highest E.A.C.!"

"It looks very uncertain then."

"Sometimes I think I'd be better off in the mines, or on Marscol—or—in the hell of the pre-atomics!"

She looked amused. "What did you say your E. A. C. was?"

"Oh, all right. Sorry." I controlled myself and grinned. "I guess this whole thing has been just a little too much for me. Maybe my E. A. C.'s even gone down."

"That might be your chance then."

"How do you mean?"

"If you could get to the top man in Opsych and demonstrate that your number has inadvertently changed your E.A.C., he might be able to justify a change."

"By the State, he might!" I punched my palm. "Only how do I get to him?"

"I can find his location on the cyb here. Center One, the capital, for a guess. You'll have to get a travel permit to go there, of course. Just a moment."

She worked at the machine again, trying it on general data. The printed slip came out a moment later and she read it to me. Chief, Opsych, was in the capital all right. It didn't give the exact location of his office, but it did tell how to find the underground bay in Center One containing the Opsych offices.

We headed back through the passageway then and she kept well ahead of me. I couldn't keep my eyes from her walk, from the way she walked with everything below her shoulders. My blood was pounding at my temples again.

I tried to keep the conversation going. "Do you think it'll be hard to get a travel permit?"

"Not impossible. My guess is that you'll be at Travbur all day tomorrow, maybe even the next day. But you ought to be able to swing it if you hold out long enough."

I sighed. "I know. It's that way everywhere in Northern. Our motto ought to be, 'Why make it difficult when with just a little more effort you can make it impossible?'"

SHE started to laugh, and then, as she emerged from the passageway into the big circular room, she cut her laugh short.

A second later, as I came along, I saw why.

There were two Deacons by the central desk. They were burly and had that hard, pinched-face look and wore the usual black belts. Electric clubs hung from the belts. Spidery looking pistols were at their sides.

I didn't know whether these two had heard my crack or not. I know they kept looking at me.

Lara and I crossed the room silently, she back to her desk, I to the exit door. The Deacons' remote, disapproving eyes swung in azimuth, tracking us.

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I walked out and wanted to turn and smile at Lara, and get into my smile something of the hope that someday, somewhere, I'd see her again—but of course I didn't dare.

III

I HAD the usual difficulties at Travbur the next day. I won't go into them, except to say that I was batted from office to office like a ping pong ball, and that, when I finally got my travel permit, I was made to feel that I had stolen an original Picasso from the State Museum.

I made it in a day. Just. I got my permit thirty seconds before closing time. I was to take the jetcopter to Center One at 0700 hours the following morning.

In my living machine that evening, I was much too excited to work at theoretical research as I usually did after a hard day of tramping around. I bathed, I paced a while, I sat and hummed nervously and got up and paced again. I turned on the telepuppets. There was a drama about the space pilots who fly the nonconformist prisoners to the forests and pulp-acetate plants on Mars. Seemed that the Southern political prisoners who are confined to the southern hemisphere of Mars, wanted to attack and conquer the north. The nonconformists, led by our pilot, came through for the State in the end. Corn is thicker than water. Standard.

There were, however, some good stereofilm shots of the limitless forests of Mars, and I wondered what it would be like to live there, in a green, fresh-smelling land. Pleasant, I supposed, if you could put up with the no doubt revolting morality of a prison planet.

And the drama seemed to point out that there was no more security for the nonconformists out there than for us here on Earth. Maybe somewhere in the universe, I thought, there would be peace for men. Somewhere beyond the solar system, perhaps, someday when we had the means to go there . . .

Yet instinct told me that wasn't the answer, either. I thought of a verse by an ancient pre-atomic poet named Hoffenstein. (People had unwieldy, random combinations of letters for names in those days.) The poem went:

> Wherever I go,
> *I* go too,
> And spoil everything.

That was it. The story of mankind.

I turned the glowlight down and lay on the pneumo after a while, but I didn't sleep for a long, long time.

Then, when I did sleep, when I had been sleeping, I heard the voice again. The low, seductive woman's voice—the startling, shocking voice out of my unconscious.

"You have taken the first step," she said. *"You are on your way to*

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freedom. Don't stop now. Don't sink back into the lifelessness of conformity. Go on . . . on and on. Keep struggling, for that is the only answer . . ."

I DIDN'T exactly talk back, but in the queer way of the dream, I *thought* objections. I was in my thirties, at the mid-point of my life, and the whole of that life had been spent under the State. I knew no other way to act. Suppressing what little individuality I might have was, for me, a way of survival. I was chockful of prescribed, stereotyped reactions, and I held onto them even when something within me told me what they were. This wasn't easy, this breaking away, not even this slight departure from the secure, camouflaged norm . . .

"*The woman, Lara, attracts you,*" said the voice.

I suppose at that point I twitched or rolled in my sleep. Yes, the voice was right, the woman Lara attracted me. So much that I ached with it.

"*Take her. Find a way. When you succeed in changing your name, and know that you can do things, then find a way. There will be a way.*"

The idea at once thrilled and frightened me.

I woke writhing and in a sweat again.

It was morning.

I dressed and headed for the jet-copter stage and the ship for Center One.

The ship was comfortable and departed on time, a transport with seats for about twenty passengers. I sat near the tail and moodily busied myself watching the gaunt brown earth far below. Between Centers there was mostly desert, only occasional patches of green. Before the atomic decade, I had heard, nearly all the earth was green and teemed with life . . . birds, insects, animals, people, too. It was hard rock and sand now, with a few scrubs hanging on for life. The pre-atomics, who hadn't mastered synthesization, would have a hard time scratching existence from the earth today.

I tried to break the sad mood, and started to look around at some of the other passengers. That was when I first noticed the prisoners in the forward seats. Man and woman, they were, a youngish, rather nondescript couple, thin, very quiet. They were manacled and two Deacons sat across from them. The Deacons' backs were turned to me and I could see the prisoners' faces.

They had curious faces. Their eyes were indescribably sad, and yet their lips seemed to be ready to smile at any moment.

They were holding hands, not seeming to care about this vulgar emotional display.

I had the sudden crazy idea that Lara and I were sitting there, holding hands like that, nonconforming in the highest, and that we were wonderfully happy. Our eyes were sad too, but we were really happy,

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quietly happy, and that was why our lips stayed upon the brink of a smile.

I SIGHED. My mood was just as sad, if not sadder, than it had been before.

Later, in the rest room, I had a chance to talk to one of the Deacons guarding these two. I was washing my hands when he came in, and he nodded to me briefly and said, "Nice day for a flight."

He seemed pleasant enough, more than I would expect a Deacon to be. He was tall and blond and rather lithe; his shoulders sloped forward like a boxer's.

"Taking those prisoners to Center One?" I asked.

He nodded. "Yup. Habitual nonconforms. About as bad as they come."

"What did they do?"

He chuckled lasciviously. "Kept meeting each other in the rec centers. Didn't know they were being watched. We nabbed 'em topside after they'd gone out in the desert together."

"What happens to them now—Marscol?"

"They'd be lucky, brother, if that was only it. Oh, we'll ship 'em to Mars sooner or later, but first they got to be interviewed."

"You mean for reclassification?"

"No. Just interviewed. We do it routine with everybody we pick up now. Specially morals cases. That's how we crack down on other nonconforms. They got a regular organization, you know."

"They *have?*"

"Sure. They're all Southern spies. Trying to weaken us for an attack, that's all. I can spot 'em a mile away."

I frowned and cleared my throat a little. "Wouldn't you think that any spies would try to act as normal as possible and not call attention to themselves by infracting morally?"

He put a big finger on my chest. "Listen, you got no idea. I see these buzzards in operation all the time. I know what goes on."

"Of course. I'm sure you do." I kept the sarcasm out of my voice, but it was a struggle.

The finger tapped my chest, once to every word, it seemed. "We interview 'em all. Some of 'em, they really got nothing to tell us and the interview kind of breaks 'em. Know what I mean? But we got to do it. If we only get dope on other nonconforms from one out of ten, we figure we didn't waste our time."

"You mean these—interviews of yours are a form of *torture?*"

He gave me a hard eye and said, "We don't call it that, brother. We don't call it that."

"Of course," I said again, and went back to washing my hands.

I watched the prisoners for the rest of the flight. I couldn't stop watching them. And all this time I kept thinking of Lara, visualizing

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her, seeing her young figure and her light hair and her mouse-colored eyes, and not really knowing why.

I had the overpowering desire to spring forward and throttle the two Deacons and help the prisoners to escape. *Almost* overpowering. I didn't, naturally.

The jetcopter lowered toward the great green parks that cover the topside area of Center One. It was really refreshing to see them. I understood that the lucky residents of Center One were allowed to wander in these parks, and look at the growing things and the sky. Then, presently, the parks were out of sight again and we were settling on the concrete landing stage and I was back to reality.

THE first contact at the Office of Pyschological Adjustment was, as usual, an information desk. There were people instead of cybs to greet you and I suppose that was because of the special complications of problems brought here. The cybs have their limits, after all.

A gray man with a gray eye and a face like a mimeographed bulletin looked at me and said, in approved voice and standard phraseology, "what information is desired?"

I told him.

His eyebrows rose, as if suddenly buoyant. *"Change your name?* That's impossible."

I quoted, verse and chapter, the regulation covering it. "H'm," he said. His eyebrows came down, cuddling into a scowl. "Well, that's highly unusual procedure. Better let me see your identity tag."

I gave that to him and he saw my N/P status, and then my unspeakable name, and his eyebrows went up again.

"Perhaps you'd better get this straightened out with General Administration first," he said. He scribbled a slip of paper, showing me how to get there.

The rat race was on.

I found General Administration. They sent me to Activity Control. Activity Control said they couldn't do a thing until I was registered. I went to Registration. Registration said oh, no, I shouldn't have been sent there—although they'd try to direct me to the proper office if I got an okay from Investigation and Security. I. & S. said the regulation I quoted had been amended and I would have to have the amendment first and I could find that in Records. Records sent me back to the first place to get a Search Permit.

And so on.

I kept at it doggedly. Toward the end of the day my legs ached and head felt like a ball of granite. I had discovered that Opsych had nearly as many levels and tunnels and bays as Center Four in its entirety, and I had taken the intercom cars when possible, but most of it had been walking. I tightened my jaw and pulled my stomach in. I'd

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get to see the Chief if it took me a year.

That was hyperbole, of course. No man could last a year walking those dim, monotonous, aseptic corridors. How can I describe the feeling? The corridors are the same wherever you go. The glowlight comes steadily, unblinkingly, from the walls. The color is a dead oyster white.

There is always the feeling of being lost—even when you know, or think you know, exactly where you are.

IT WAS near the end of the day and I was back at the information desk.

"You again," said the gray man with the gray eye.

"Records says I need a Search Permit. I have to find an amendment on the regulation covering my case."

"Why don't you just give up? You're causing us a great deal of trouble, you know. We have other work to do. Important work."

"So have I. I'm a magnetic mechanics expert. I could be working for the State right now if I could get a post. I can't get a post till my name's changed."

"That's ridiculous."

"I agree. But it's true just the same."

"Well, here's your Search Permit. But I still think you'd be wiser to forget it. And you'd save us a lot of fuss."

I leaned across the desk. "You could save the whole organization a lot of fuss if you'd direct me to the Chief's office. Then I could take my case up with him directly. I've been keeping my eye open for it, but I can't find it anywhere, and of course nobody'll direct me there, even if they know where it is."

He stared at me with mild horror. *"Go direct to the Chief's office? Without going through channels?"*

"Well, that's what I had in mind."

"Then you'd better get it out of your mind. That's pretty dangerous thinking. That's close to infraction."

"All right." I sighed. "I'll do it the hard way." I took the Search Permit and went back to Records. I was still searching for the amendment when closing time came.

I went back into the dim white corridors and found a foodmat, got some nuro-pills and reviewed the day. These workers here in Center One were experts at putting you off. They were much more skilful than the officials in Center Four. Maybe that was why they were in Center One. Maybe I never would wear them down.

That thought came along and formed a ball of ice right in the bottom of my stomach.

I had to think. I had to think and rest. Real air and a night breeze would help.

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I found a shaft and went topside.

I started walking along a winding trail in the great park. The stars were out. They were diamonds, ground to dust, and thrown carelessly across the black velvet of the sky. The moon had not yet risen. There was a breeze, cool and light, and it brought temporary sanity. At least it helped me realize I was tired.

I came to a little brook, and, instead of crossing the foot bridge, I turned and followed the brook upstream. It led through groves of trees and presently I found a little clearing where the bank sloped gently and was covered with soft moss. At the water's edge, the bank and a rock formation made a kind of overhanging ledge and I sat on this a while and stared at the water, liquid silver, tumbling below.

Finally I moved up the bank a little, wrapped my cloak around me and lay down. I looked at the stars. I wondered which one might be Mars. It was red, I'd heard, but I saw nothing like that. Probably it wasn't visible now. I got to thinking about Mars, and I got to thinking about the prison colony there, and then I got to thinking about the primitive life, and then free-mating.

That made me think of Lara, and her firm body and long, clean limbs and blonde hair and mouse-colored eyes.

I drifted off to sleep. Lara stayed with me; she stepped into my dream. It was a wonderful dream. Her voice, when she broke from standard, was thrilling and delicious. It was linked with the tumbling of the brook somehow. She was warm and vibrant in my arms. She was alive, so alive. She was all movement.

We were laughing together and . . .

I AWOKE to the sound of shooting.

The moon had risen and the broad glades were silver green and the trees were casting shadows. Voices were barking back and forth within the woods.

"Over that way!" called one.

"Cut 'em off! Cut 'em off!" yelled another.

A man and woman, both entirely naked, both speckled with wounds and bruises, all standard in questioning, stumbled into the clearing. Their eyes were wild, big for their faces. They were thin. They gasped for breath. They looked around them, rats in mazes, and then saw me.

They drew back.

"This way!" called a voice from the wood.

Another shot rang out.

I stared at the man and woman, still too surprised to know what to do or say.

They were the two prisoners I had seen in the jetcopter on my way to Center One.

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IV

MAYBE I was not quite awake. Maybe I was not really bright, though everybody thinks of himself as bright, I suppose. Maybe it was everything that had happened since the renumbering. Maybe I was fed up and maybe something about the quiet woods called out: *Rebel! Rebel!*

I don't know.

I pointed to the brook, the overhanging bank, and said, "In there! Quick!"

They scuttled. They passed me and looked at me half-thankfully, half-fearfully.

The voices came nearer.

"Come on! This way! They can't get far!"

I wrapped myself in my cloak and sat down and pretended to be gazing at the stars.

A moment later three Deacons burst upon the clearing. I turned slowly, and stared at them, showing mild artificial surprise. Handsome, burly fellows. The one in the middle was a positive Apollo; I was sure that he waved his hair. He glared at me.

"You," he said.

"Me?"

"Yes, you. What are you doing here?"

I said, "I'm sitting here."

"What for?"

"The night air. To study the stars. Get a change of scene." I shrugged.

Apollo stepped forward and held out his hand. "Your tag."

This was it. When he saw my four letter name he'd really start working on me. I unsnapped the tag from my neck band and handed it to him.

He looked at it, but didn't change expression. The Deacons are well-trained. He looked up again. "N/P, eh?"

"Yes."

"And you belong in Center Four."

"Yes."

"Explain."

I did. Or tried to. Things were roiling around inside me, keeping me from thinking clearly. Once, as I talked, I thought I heard movement under the bank, but the Deacons didn't seem to notice anything. I tried to tell them of my troubles.

There was no sympathy in their eyes.

Apollo said, "See anybody pass by here?"

"Pass by?" I hoped my look was innocent. "Who?"

"Two fugitives. Nonconforms. Escaped during interview. Got the force screen turned off somehow—must have had spies helping them. You didn't see them, eh?"

I shook my head. "I haven't seen anyone for several hours."

APOLLO and his two friends traded glances. The one on the right was bull-necked and red-headed; the one on the left had a

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neck and nose like a crane. It was the one on the left who suddenly smiled. Not a pleasant smile. He stepped up to Apollo and whispered something in his ear. Then Apollo smiled and turned to me again.

"You're *sure* you haven't seen anyone."

He knew something. I didn't know what, but it was too late to back out now. I said, "Of course I'm sure."

Apollo kept his eyes on me, hard, flat, stony, and held out his hand to the cranelike Deacon. "Your light," he said. The other handed it to him. Apollo flashed it on the ground. It came to rest upon unmistakable footprints in the soft moss. They led to the bank.

I could be certain of arrest, and one of their little interviews now. I really had nothing to lose. Nothing that wasn't already lost—

"Run!" I shouted at the top of my lungs. "They're coming!"

There was a rustling under the bank.

I leaped at Apollo. I leaped hard, with my feet solid, pushing me forward. My shoulder hit him in the midriff. He went down. I scrambled over him and jammed my thumb into his shoulder. He screamed.

There was a buzzing sound and the smell of burned flesh, and a tenth of a second later I felt pain. One of the others had jammed his electric truncheon into the small of my back. It bored in, it burned, and I writhed and yelled. I couldn't help it. I rolled over.

Someone was kicking at me. I grabbed his leg and pulled him down and when he struck the ground I twisted. Another shape blurred toward me—Apollo, recovered and on his feet again. Then buzzing, burned flesh, and the pain this time in the back of my neck. My head swirled. I thrashed, trying to get away. Get away where? That made not much difference. Away, that was all.

The buzzing continued. It was through my flesh now and touching the spine. It would destroy the nerves in a moment. I would be dead—or even worse, a limp cripple, a rag doll.

The smell of roasted flesh and hair was a thick, choking, sickening fog of decay. I couldn't breathe. There was blackness, swirling and concentric, closing in.

I think one of them kicked me in the groin before I lost consciousness.

I couldn't be sure. I couldn't be sure of anything.

COMING out. Sound before sight and I heard the low voices. My eyes were already open. Nebulous shapes, now sharpening.

I was in a small room with gleaming metal walls and I was on my back on a sort of table. Three men were in the room with me, standing over me. Apollo . . . the

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bull-necked man . . . the man with the nose like a crane.

Apollo was smiling. Pour water over that smile and immediately a film of ice would form.

"A spy," said Apollo, looking into my open eyes. "Another damn spy."

I shook my head. Ridiculous, but that's what I did. The movement pulled at the wound in the back of my neck and sharp pain, starting there, shot through my whole body. I grimaced and groaned.

Apollo laughed, then suddenly brought his club hard across my face. My cheekbone seemed to make a crunching sound.

"A spy, a damned spy," said Apollo.

"We got a confession for you to sign," said the Crane.

Apollo said, "Shut up. Not yet. We got to interview him first."

"Look," I said, trying to lift my head, trying to rise upon my elbows, "call your chief. Call anybody like that. I can explain this whole thing. It's a long story—"

HE HIT me again across the other cheekbone.

Shall I describe the next timeless endless hour? All the details? I don't remember all of them, of course, just the moments of sharpest pain that lifted me from the daze. Just the sound of my own screaming at times, and the helpless dryness of my own throat, and the sounds that kept coming from it even when the vocal cords were numb.

Apollo and his pals had fun.

There were the electric clubs. They become so hot at the tip that they will burn through an inch of pine in a couple of seconds. They go even quicker through flesh. After a while the smoke of my own burning flesh was thick in the room, and we all choked a little on it.

They had more fun with their fists, though. They didn't burn me in the worst places. They saved them for their fists and hands.

After a while I couldn't scream. Only a hoarse, helpless, retching sound came out whenever I opened my mouth.

Did I hear their voices then? I couldn't be sure whether I heard them speak, or whether I dreamed that they spoke.

"He can't feel it any more now." That was Apollo's voice.

"Wake him up again," said the Crane. "Give him a shot."

"Oh, hell, I'm hungry," said Apollo.

"All right," said the Crane, "let's go get something to eat. We can always come back again."

Blackness, sweet blackness, and the sense of floating among the stars. Nothingness. It was exquisite now . . . even the touch of agony that still seeped through was exquisite.

How much of this, I don't know.

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I heard a voice again, and at first I thought my precious blackness was leaving me. I struggled to keep it. I grasped out, clutching with my mind.

"Don't give up . . . we are coming . . ."

It was *her* voice. The low, seductive voice of my dreams. But I didn't want to hear it now; this was the last thing I wanted to hear. This voice had brought me here, and I never wanted to hear it again.

"No matter what they say . . . no matter what they offer you or tell you . . . don't give up."

I fought it off. I drove it away by sheer mind-power. Either that or it stopped of itself. I didn't know and didn't care; all I wanted was peace and blackness again if I could find it.

And then, after a while, I was awake, truly awake, and I knew this because I ached and burned all over. I could scarcely move. I lay on the tablelike thing and stared at the gleaming metal ceiling, not really seeing it.

"How do you feel?" said somebody.

I TURNED my head. The somebody was sitting beside me. He was a man of about fifty, thick-set and gray-haired with skin that looked like fine porcelain. His eyes were blue and they seemed able, intelligent. He was not exactly smiling, but his expression was pleasant. Poised—that was the word. Here was a man who would quietly control things wherever he would go.

I said, "Lousy. And you?"

Ghost of a smile. "Sorry you had to go through it. We pick the Deacons because they're sadistically inclined. That makes for efficiency in the long run. Some people suffer, of course, but it's for the common good."

I didn't say anything. If I had, it would have been insulting, unreasonable, blasphemous, obscene and treasonable. So I didn't say anything. I just kept staring at him.

He continued to smile. "I'm N-J-K-F one seven seven three four nine, Chief of the Office of Psychological Adjustment. I'm usually simply Chief. I want you to consider me your friend—within the limits of State good, that is."

I still didn't say anything.

"Yours is quite a case, and of course I understand it. I think I had a quick insight into it the moment I spotted the arrest report on you. You're really lucky I happened to go through the arrest reports a little while ago, and got to you before the three Deacons who interviewed you returned. They were going to interview you some more."

"Yes. I'm very lucky." My voice was flat, lifeless.

He leaned back easily in the chair. For all that he was thick-set, he was graceful. He was handsome. His head, and deep, pleasant voice, and the cut of his porcelain

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features all were handsome. Trust in me, said this handsomeness, I am a father to all men.

"Naturally, we want to excuse your actions, and all the infractions you have committed in your rather desperate struggle for escape from your situation. Of course we'll have to re-evaluate your Emotional Adjustment Category. It must be very low by now. And I think I'll be able to assign a new name to you, and have it justify."

Funny, here was the thing I'd sought and fought for, and now I had it, and this was the end of the long fight, and I didn't feel triumphant at all. I didn't even feel pleased. Funny.

The chief said, "You can undoubtedly find a post suitable to a lower E.A.C. You can work your way up again. At least you'll be on productive status and have all the privileges that go with it."

"Yes," I said. "Yes, I suppose so."

"So there's really nothing to worry about now, is there?"

"No, I suppose not."

"There's just one little thing I'd like to go into before I take the steps necessary to get you on your feet again." Even his magnificent poise couldn't conceal the feather touch of slyness then.

"One little thing?" I asked.

THE pain was with me again. My body wasn't flesh; it was all raw, clinging pain.

"We'll have to know who started you on your little quest. Who influenced you to try to have your name changed."

I said, "I don't understand what you're talking about."

He looked patient, smilingly patient. "It's rather obvious, you know. You wouldn't have acted as you did purely on your own impulses. I know that, because I cybed for your master file after I saw the report of arrest. Up until two days ago, your actions have always been satisfactorily conformal. A man doesn't change overnight like that without some sort of external influence."

"But there wasn't any," I protested. "I mean, nobody told me to do anything. Nobody real."

He chuckled. "Come now, you don't expect me to believe that, do you? After all, I deal with cases like this quite often. You're not the only one who has tried to upset the efficiency of the State. There's a pattern in these things, my friend. Almost invariably we find that a deliberate influence has gone to work on our infractor. There's a dangerous, organized underground movement that spends its time bringing these things about. One of its members unquestionably contacted you, suggested that you take the steps you have taken. Now, then, who was it?"

"Nobody." I looked blank because I felt blank.

The Chief sighed. "You've

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changed more than I thought. Probably you're emotionally angry with the State now, after that little interview with the Deacons. That's understandable. But you'll have to come back to your senses. Let's put it this way, old man. *If I don't get this information from you right now, the Deacons will.*"

"Listen," I said, "what I'm telling you is the truth. There was nobody who told me to do anything. There was—well, there was a kind of voice that used to come into my dreams. A woman's voice. It suggested, in my dreams, that I go ahead and try to get my name changed. That's all."

He wasn't smiling any more. "Do you really expect me to believe that?"

"It's the truth, I tell you. It's the truth!"

"Perhaps whoever influenced you did it subtly. Perhaps you never even realized it. Think back now. Who helped you? Who departed from standard and gave you any kind of aid?"

Realization came like a cold wash. There had been help. Lara. She had gone out of her way back there in N. & I. She had been warm and real and she had dropped the mask of efficiency. Could it have been with a purpose? No matter. Guilty or innocent, if I mentioned her name, she would be interviewed. I didn't want that to happen to Lara. I shook my head and said, "No one helped me. I did it all myself. You've got to believe that."

"I don't," said the Chief, and got up. He looked at me for just a moment before he turned away. He said, "The boys will be able to have their fun, after all. I suppose it's just as well. It keeps their morale up to be able to interview somebody once in a while."

"No! You can't! You can't send them in here again!" I shouted, without meaning to. I struggled to rise and found that I was strapped to the table. "No! No!"

He was standing at the doorway to the room. He held a key-box oscillator in his hand and I knew that a force screen held me in the cubicle here, and that without a key-box I could beat my head forever against that invisible barrier and never pass through that doorway. He said, "I'll give you one hour to decide. I'll be back. I'll ask you if you're ready to talk. If you aren't—well, you'll talk to the Deacons instead of me."

The key-box hummed and he walked through the doorway and turned and disappeared.

I stared after him and fought back my sudden nausea.

V

HOW long, then, lying there before a key-box hummed again? I didn't know. My time sense had been dulled. Even the pain was dull now; it was something that had always existed.

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I looked at the shining ceiling.

The glowlights began to dim and I supposed that since my arrest in the park another day had passed.

Most of all, I wondered. Something had happened to me, something that I could almost feel as a physical change, but I didn't know quite what it was. I knew its results. I knew that I was no longer standard, no longer conformal, no longer well-behaved and moral and an efficient, useful citizen of the State. I hated the State. I hated all States. I hate all efficiency and common sense and hate.

It suddenly came to me that I didn't care whether I was in Southem or Northem, or which of them ruled the world.

I lay there.

And presently a key-box hummed and I didn't even look that way. The stink of my own burning flesh still clung to my nostrils, the dull pain was still with me, but I didn't care. It was too much. When horror becomes too great, it stops being horror. The mind is smart. It doesn't believe; it doesn't register. The curve of sensation flattens out, stops, almost.

When such horror looms, you go on doing whatever you are doing.

I was lying there, so I went on lying there.

"Don't speak," whispered a voice. "Don't ask questions."

Something fumbled at the straps. I turned my head, and two people were in the room. They were thin, and their eyes were overlarge and they were naked and covered with bruises. The fugitives of the park last night!

"What are you doing here?"

Finger to the lips. That was the man. He was taking the straps from my legs. The woman was releasing my arms and shoulders.

"But—"

"Sh!" That was the woman.

In a moment they had me free. I started, confidently, to rise, and the pain streaked through me like a powder rocket. They helped me. I stood there, amazed that I could stand. They helped me go forward. I took several dizzy steps, and after that it wasn't as bad. We moved through the doorway; there was no force screen. The man held the key-box. He pressed it as we moved away, to bring the force screen into place once more.

I said, "Where are we—?"

I was shushed again. We went on through the corridors. Dead oyster white corridors. I walked as through a sea of marshmallow. Time sense was gone again and we were pushing on and on and there was no end in sight and we had already forgotten the beginning.

We took an automatic shaft to another level and walked more corridors.

ONCE we passed an opening and tunnelcars filled with people roared past. I had a flash glimpse of them. They sat there staring straight

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ahead, wearing the efficient expressions of good workers. State corpses.

Suddenly we emerged into the dark. It was the dark of night, but after the tunnels it was practically sunrise. The air was clean—no, it was not actually as clean as the conditioned air below. It was more than clean. It was *alive.*

We were on the edge of a great concrete paved area. About a hundred yards ahead, a massive, shining, fat needle rose into the air, and squatted there against the stars. It was a spaceship in its launching cradle. There were low buildings near it, a few floodlights, and people standing around. It took a moment to realize that the men walking up and down and along the groups of people, the men with rifles on their shoulders, were guards.

"Luck, now, that's all we need. A little luck," said the thin man beside me. It was the first time I had heard his voice. It was a low voice; he spoke with emotion. It was not approved standard.

The woman moved beside him and put her hand upon his arm.

I said, "May I talk now?"

He turned to me, smiling. The smile had something of that sadness I had first noticed when he sat a prisoner in the jetcopter. "You want an explanation, don't you? Of course you do. But I'm afraid I can't tell you very much, except that we were sent to get you."

"Sent? By whom? How did you have a key-box? And—"

He laughed. "Wait, one question at a time. I was a force screen technician before—before we were arrested. Cells are the same everywhere. I know how to short the screens out from the inside; it's troublesome, but it can be done. That's how we escaped the first time. Then they discovered we were gone, chased us, and *you* gave us our second chance. We came here to the rendezvous. There were six here, including our elected leader. When we told the leader what had happened, she arranged for us to return, find you, and help you escape. It wasn't any problem to lift a key-box from the rack where they're usually kept."

I FELT as though I had been put upon the end of a huge oscillating spring. I said, "The leader? She?"

"You'll meet her," he said. "After blastoff you'll meet her. Right now our problem is to slip in among those prisoners without being seen."

"Among the *prisoners?*"

"Haven't time to explain more. You'll have to trust us. Unless you want to stay here and have the Deacons hunt you till they find you."

He was right: wherever I was going, I had to go. I couldn't go back now. Ever. I said, "I trust you. Let's go."

Slipping in wasn't really difficult. There were only one or two guards

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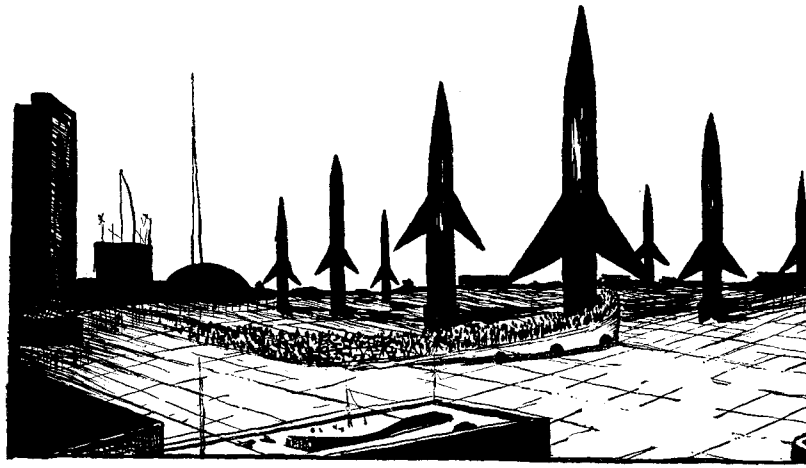

for each group of prisoners, and they were looking for someone to escape, not join their flock. Some of the prisoners were dressed, some naked. Some looked bruised and beaten; some did not. It all depended on whether they had been questioned. They all looked dull-eyed, resigned. They paid remarkably little attention as we moved in among them, and stood there.

THE guards began to call out orders presently and the groups shuffled forward, and then single lines moved up the ramp and into the spaceship. The thin man and his woman were still with me. "They don't bother to count," he whispered, "so we won't be noticed."

I wanted to ask him other questions, but we were divided into groups and they weren't in mine.

Minutes later I found myself in the vast hull, sitting on one of the tiers that hold the seats vertical when the ship is tail-based for blastoff. It was very dim here and I couldn't readily make out the faces of the people on the same tier with me.

A loudspeaker came to life; a deep, impersonal voice. "Fasten your webbings carefully!"

I did that and heard the rustling sounds about me as the others did it, too.

"Stand by for blastoff!"

There was a dead pause, then a sudden low throbbing roar and the feeling of life in the floor plates and the bulkheads. I felt the slightest weight of pressure against the seat. The seat began to tilt slightly.

Suddenly a soft voice on my left spoke: *"We're on our way. They can't stop us now, can they?"*

It was the same low, provocative

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woman's voice that I had heard in my dreams!

I whirled my head. I could see only the shape of flowing hair, no features. "Who are you?"

She laughed. "No wonder you don't recognize me. The natural voice is different than approved standard, isn't it? Listen. Do you remember this?" The head cocked to one side and a crisp, formal voice came out. "Information you desire is in Bank 29."

"Lara!" I said. I pushed toward her, but the webbing held me back.

"Yes. It's I. And we're together now and we'll have a long, long time to find out about each other. It's ten weeks to Mars."

I RAN my hand over my forehead. "I don't get it. I don't get any of it. Your voice—I mean your real voice, not the standard one—I dreamed about it, and—"

"I know." I could see her nod. "It wasn't a dream, though. I *was* talking to you. Each time. That was the way we planned it from the beginning."

"Talking to me? But—but *how*? Through the sleep-learner?"

"No, we'd never have been able to arrange that. It was through your identity tag, which would almost always be in contact with your skin when you slept. It has a microscopic electrical circuit, both between its metal halves and painted on its surface. The same principle as the sleep-learner, tactile induction, and, of course, a highly selective one-channel receiver. All I needed to do was put my transmitter on that same frequency."

I shook my head. "I follow, I guess, but I'm still baffled. Why all this? When did—"

"Wait for me to finish," she said. "We've been organized and underground, just as the Deacons suspect, for some time. One of our members worked on the identity tags and, when renumbering came about, it was a perfect opportunity to plant the receivers. We picked our people carefully. We picked doctors and hydroponic experts and chemists and rocket pilots—and we picked you because of your knowledge of space drive theory. Someday we'll go on to the stars; someday you'll help us do that. Anyway, all these people we have picked—or most of them—are joining us on Mars. There's where mankind will begin again while Northern and Southern sit upon earth and glare at each other across the equator and wait for war."

"But Mars—there's an equator there, too."

She laughed. "Northern and Southern prisoners there mingle all the time. There aren't enough guards to notice it, or stop it if they did notice it. There have even been hundreds of intermarriages."

"Marriages? You mean like the pre-atomics?"

"Exactly. But we'll get to that later. We needed you for our

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colony, only it wasn't likely that you'd infract all by yourself. You were too standard, too adjusted. We had to give you something to shake you out of it, to make you realize that the security of the State was not security, but slavery. And so one of our members in the renumbering bureau arranged for you to have that four letter word of yours for a name. One thing led to another, then, not always exactly as we'd planned it, but always in the same general direction. Our whole plan nearly failed when the Deacons nabbed you in the park. Fortunately, I'd come along to stow away on this trip, and I sent those others back after you."

"But what if I'd actually managed to get my name changed?"

THE ship was swaying now, balanced on its rocket trail. The acceleration was increasing. The seat was swinging back. The roar was becoming louder.

"It was unlikely enough to take a chance on it. We felt at the very least you'd be kept on N/P status and then we could work on you some more until you infracted, and got sent to Marscol as a nonconform. Funny, that seems a terrible fate to most people. Actually, it's the only escape. From what I hear of Mars we'll like it there."

I was recovering a little now and I dared to say, "If you're there, too, I'll like it. I know that."

"Oh, you'll like other things. You'll like everything. And on Mars they'll call you by your present name if you wish, and no one will be at all shocked by it." There was a slight pause and then she said, "In fact, it's a very nice name. I—I wouldn't mind having it myself."

"Is that what the pre-atomics called a proposal?"

She laughed. "I'm not sure. But at least we have ten weeks to talk it over—"

And then the acceleration pressed hard and the gray curtain began to come, and I knew that when it was lifted we would be on our way through space. I thought in that moment of the name that had brought all this about—the unspeakable four letter word that no conformist would ever dare voice, or even think of; the word, the dangerous word inimical to all that the warring, efficient State meant and stood for.

The word, I realized, that eventually would destroy all that.

I dared to say it now. I spelled it out first, and then I pronounced it. Just loud enough for Lara to hear above the growing roar. "L-O-V-E," I said. "Love."

I heard Lara repeat it before the momentary blackout came.

—WALT SHELDON

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Field Study

By PETER PHILLIPS

This could be an Easter story. It would be much easier to tell if legend didn't sound so exactly like truth—or we moderns knew one from the other!

"WHAT'S it today?" asked the neurotic Mrs. Francis Pake. "Overtime or that night out?"

"I can't tell you for certain, sweet. I'll phone you. I'm nearly sure, but—"

"This is it," said Betty Pake. She got up from the breakfast table. "Change your job or change your wife. Quite simple, Frank. I thought I'd married a man, not an accounting machine."

She said a lot more before Pake finished his breakfast. He sighed, missed when he pecked for her cheek, and left.

The Mitchell embezzlement which had kept him in the office all hours for the past three months had been finally straightened out yesterday, and full material for the indictment handed over. Tonight, dine, dance and drink with Betty—unless something new turned up. She rated the break, of course, apart from the fact that her nerves, unsettled by a quiet life, played hell with his digestion. Maybe she should have married a younger man, with time and money to spare for her idea of living.

He realized uncomfortably that he was half hoping something would prevent the date.

The assignment this morning, for instance. It was out of the ordinary. No books to examine or reluctant employees to quiz politely but inexorably. He got straight onto it before going to the office.

Early as it was, the waiting room

Illustrated by JAMES VINCENT

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in which he found himself was full. Forty patients at least. An obvious Parkinsonism stumbled to a bench. Every disease seemed to be represented there, from cancer to cretinism.

He recalled the chief's instructions: make no fuss, get in line with the others, take what he hands out and—bring it back.

"You have an appointment?" asked the dull-eyed, dull-voiced receptionist.

"No, but if this is an open session, I'll hang around on the off-chance. My time's my own."

"Name?"

"Shando. James."

Did those dull eyes light up? No reason to. So far as he knew, the quack had no reason to suspect a Federal investigation.

"Sit down, please."

What was it, Pake asked himself as she went into an inside office —faith healing? That wouldn't fix peritonitis. But that was only a report. He'd have to wait and ask careful questions. Careful, because patients don't usually question doctors on their training and background.

He looked casually at the man next to him. A young Eurasian, drawn-in, huddled, gloved hands clasped together, as if in silent, fierce prayer.

"What ails, feller?"

The Eurasian seemed to shrink even further into himself, shook his head almost imperceptibly. *Please don't notice me.* It was as plain as words.

Then Pake saw the patch of silvery skin beneath the ear. He muttered, "Hell," and jerked away.

"Sorry, sorry." The faintest of whispers. "Not contagious."

"Maybe not, but you shouldn't be here. You should be—" Pake stopped, uneasy. There was a world of misery in the man's eyes.

If the fake beyond that door was giving false hope to poor devils like this . . . But that didn't make it a government matter. It was up to the state, or the local branch of the F.M.A. He didn't call himself a doctor, of course, nor did he advertise. But did that put him in the clear?

Pake cursed the brevity of his instructions. "If you question him," the chief had said, "make it simple. You can be normally curious, but that's all. And if he gets cagy, cut it out. You're not going as an agent. You're just an errand boy, Frankie, and you know as much as I do."

The receptionist came back, walked over to him.

"It seems you did have an appointment," she lied calmly. "This way."

A DOOR closed behind him. Pake, off-guard, found himself talking before he had taken in the scene. "This is good of you, doctor, but I had no appointment. I don't like jumping the line."

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"I am entitled to use my discretion. You are an interesting case. Sit down. And please don't call me doctor. In the healing profession, that title is reserved for those who have taken the Hippocratic oath. My name is Trancore."

Pake shut his mind to a thousand questions and concentrated on one. "How do you know about my case? You've never seen me before."

"My receptionist," said the man behind the desk, "has intuitive diagnostic ability."

THAT settled it, Pake thought. A first-water quack. Heck, he'd never had a day's real sickness in his forty years. Mild post-nasal drip, maybe, but that was probably a penalty for oversmoking. He felt the tickle of it at the back of his throat now. He blew his nose. It gave him a few seconds to think and observe.

The "healer" was quite unremarkable except for an almost unnoticeable Asiatic tinge of skin. His features might have been the compounded norm of a thousand faces flittingly seen during a subway rush-hour. He'd be lost in a crowd. No, put him in a crowd and he would be the crowd— The fantastic thought touched Pake's consciousness and slid away before he could examine it.

The office, rented furnished, was quite unimpressive. Old-fashioned wooden desk, cheap chairs, battered filing cabinet, empty, Pake was willing to bet.

"Symptoms?" Trancore asked.

"Seems you can tell me," Pake said with a trace of belligerence.

"Let's say the recital is part of the treatment. I don't wish to guess."

It *should* be an "interesting case." Pake had spent an hour boning up on it at a medical library. An obscure disease, a complexus of symptoms calculated to faze the most expert diagnostician for a while. It would certainly defeat the snap diagnoses and miraculously swift cures attributed to this phony. And no doctor could confirm it without the most exhaustive physical examination, which this fellow didn't go in for, apparently.

As Pake was talking, Trancore looked into a drawer of his desk. His face was without expression.

He looked up only when Pake finished, and smiled. "Prognosis, death within eleven months, eh? But you won't die. Take this in water." He put a plastic capsule within Pake's reach.

"But this is crazy! How do I know—"

"You don't. I make no claims. What did you expect, a long, obscure rigmarole? You can take the capsule or leave it. How many tokens—pounds—do you have with you?"

"But listen, doctor—"

"I'm not a doctor. How much?"

"Around fifty, I suppose."

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"Give me twenty-five for the capsule, which you take on faith. If you take it."

"You say I'll die if I don't?"

"I said nothing of the kind. I have no intention of running foul of your laws. Please make up your mind."

Pake took it.

"AS MUCH personality as a boiled duck," Pake reported to his chief. "But somehow I couldn't get around to asking questions."

The chief tossed the capsule in his palm. "That doesn't matter. This is all we wanted."

The laboratories took five hours to break it down, make tests and come up with the final, head-scratching nonsense line: just a mess of soluble protein with no discernible physiological reactions.

"That was yours," the chief said. "These were brought in by the others, a plainclothes man from Police H.Q., an employee of the National Medical Association, an official of the N.M.A., and a private investigator."

Pake leafed through the reports. "The same?"

"Yes. But here are three reports on capsules given to genuine patients and 'borrowed' for analysis afterward. The patients didn't miss a thing, even though the operative substituted similar capsules containing water and a vegetable dye. It took five minutes for the laboratory to discover that that's all the 'borrowed' capsules contained, also."

Pake began to laugh. Then he remembered the leper. "Can't Trancore be booked for fraud?"

"How? He makes no claims for the damned things. And in several instances, he's given them away. But don't you see the implication of these reports?"

Pake nodded. "Patients get water. Investigators get something just as useless—except for giving laboratory men a headache. So he knows who is what. I don't get it."

"You will. I'm turning the case over to you, Frankie."

"I'm interested. But how come it's on our level?"

"It's international. Come and meet the United Nations." The chief frowned as he rose. "I've been trying to put my finger on something since you came in. Now I've got it. Your voice."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Not a thing. Sounds clearer, somehow."

Pake stood very still. He swore, slowly, then cleared his throat. There was nothing to clear. "My post-nasal drip!" He blew his nose frantically, pointlessly. "It's gone!"

SIR Greville Gray of London, Luchaire of Paris, Frend of Berlin, Stawowy of Prague—Pake heard substantially the same story from each.

In Harley Street, London's spe-

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cialist district, Trancore had rented a £50 a week consulting room, given free treatment to two cardiac cases, then pulled out when the waiting list grew unmanageable—or when he'd fulfilled his unknown purpose.

Gray, chairman of the English Medical Association, had interviewed him officially.

"Impudent little devil called me 'the chief witch-doctor.' I nearly assaulted him." Gray squared his massive shoulders. "When I said we'd prosecute, he flatly denied that he practiced medicine at all. 'To arraign me,' he said, 'you would have to prove that I give treatment, that I charge for it, make claims for it, and that it may prove harmful. You cannot even prove the first accusation.' I pointed out that he dispensed capsules and charged for them. He said, 'They expect something material, like the evil-smelling charms you give them. I offer them a capsule. They take it or leave it. It makes no difference. They pay or don't pay. That makes no difference, either. I prefer them to pay. It makes my stay shorter.'

"I asked whether he expected me to believe that his patients were cured no matter what course they took. 'They are not my patients,' he said. 'If, after they have visited me, a cure is effected and they claim my instrumentality, then that is not my responsibility.'

"In a word, he disclaims everything, even success. Two days later, when a newspaper followed up a tip about so-called 'miracle cures,' a reporter found a queue stretching out into the street—and an empty office. Ten weeks later, the fellow turns up in Paris, and the business starts over again."

"But not," said Dr. Luchaire gently, "the same man."

Sir Greville shifted uneasily in his chair. "A good disguise."

"Photographs?" asked Pake.

His chief, smiling a little, handed him two buttonhole camera enlargements. There was an elusive similarity, a strained family likeness; but neither was patently of the man Pake had seen that morning.

Pake said, "The norm of a crowd. If it's the same man, he's a human chameleon."

ATTEMPTS to get fingerprints had been curiously unsuccessful. Either he had had them obliterated through surgery or he put on gloves before touching anything. Maybe he made sure to touch nothing. The last idea was fantastic, but what wasn't about this case?

Pake asked, "Why has no effort been made before to collate available material, if this has been going on for so long?"

Dr. Frend of Berlin grunted. "The medical profession is not an international police force. There is fraternal exchange of information in periodicals, naturally, but no

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medical man would risk his reputation by lending credence to such a fantastic rumor as, for instance, the cure of an advanced leukemia."

"But that man was my own patient!" Dr. Stawowy of Prague was indignant.

"I'm not challenging your veracity or ability. Genuinely mistaken diagnoses are not unknown," Frend said coldly. "I was merely explaining to this gentleman why there has been such delay in instigating an international investigation. The matter was brought into the open only recently at a European congress, of which I happened to be chairman. The feeling of the meeting was that these rumors should be traced to their source, as a professional and public duty. I agreed to act as coordinator of a small sub-committee appointed for this purpose. That is why we are here. Personally, I am not convinced that this man is anything more than a faker and an opportunist."

Michaels of the N.M.A. shook his head. "A man from an adjacent office was carried in to him a couple of days ago with every symptom of a burst appendix. This 'faker' protested at first, said he wasn't a doctor. Then he asked to be left alone with him. Ten minutes later, that man walked out unaided."

"Nicely stage-managed," said Frend. "He was a stooge."

"We checked. It's difficult to believe there was collusion. The patient is a solid, decent citizen. He said the pain began to go when Trancore had been looking at him for a while. In his own words, he felt something moving in his guts, and then the pain stopped."

"I find it less difficult to believe that he was a stooge," repeated Frend obstinately.

Pake's chief intervened. "Gentlemen, my department has received instructions to give you every assistance in obtaining information about this man. Mr. Pake will be in charge. We are not concerned with the medical side of the case, but only with its legal aspects."

HE paused, dropped diplomatic language. "Though why in hell it should be my department instead of the police, or the D.A.'s office, or the Bureau of Public Welfare, or the Bureau of Immigration is something I still haven't figured."

Sir Greville Gray said, "In every instance where a direct law-enforcement agency was about to investigate, even before his identity papers could be asked for, the man has disappeared. His nationality is unknown. He operates only for as long as he can escape widespread notice and police attention. That's why the few newspaper stories that have appeared are quite disconnected and based solely on speculation. Your approach must be very discreet."

"Seems it'll have to be invisible, too," Pake said. "He knows I'm

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an operative already. But he cured my—"

Pake stopped. Maybe his post-nasal drip had cleared up of its own accord. It was a comforting thought. He wished he could believe it.

IN HIS office— "I'm sorry, sweetkin," he told the phone. "Just can't make it tonight. I've got to stay on this case. It's—er—detective work. The police are helping me."

The nerve-edged vehemence of his wife's voice grated on his ear. He held the receiver an inch away.

"So you think you're a real G-man now, a big tough hero running around with a bottle of rye and a blonde. Well, listen, hero, I hope they shoot first. I'm through."

"It's nothing like that, hon. You're getting mixed up, anyway. Bureau men don't drink on duty. And you're pretty hard to please—you called me an accounting machine this morning. But look, lovesome, I'll be home around seven. It's just that I have to stay near a phone. We could play checkers. And I promise I'll grab me a day off—"

He held the receiver six inches from his ear. "I'm sorry," he said again loudly and lowered the phone, which was still angrily vibrating, to the cutoff.

There was a note on the kitchen table when he got home.

"An old school friend called. Anyway, that's my story, hero. And we're going places. Don't wait up."

Pake sighed. Hero . . . He curled his lean body up in a chair by the phone with a book.

The call came at midnight: "He's skipped."

"I was waiting for that. I've seen the papers. Keep on it."

Pake turned back to the midnight editions. There were few facts. Three patients had been interviewed. From the descriptions, one was the Eurasian with leprosy he had seen that morning.

The word-of-mouth snowball and the inevitable newspaper swoop had taken just two weeks this time. In Paris, Trancore had lasted a month.

One newspaper admitted that they had an anonymous call claiming a miracle cure, days previously, but had put it down to a cultist bid for publicity.

The phone rang again. The caller said, "If this guy doesn't come out of his office soon, these newspapermen will bust the door down. What shall I do?"

"You're on loan from the police, aren't you? If they try that, identify yourself and threaten to book 'em. You don't need to mention that Trancore isn't in that office anyway."

The phone spluttered disbelief.

Pake grimaced. "I know how you feel, sergeant. Maybe he flew out of the window. He was picked up as he came out of the front

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entrance, and I'm waiting to hear where he holes up. But spin those reporters some yarn and keep them there if you can."

Pake shook his head as he put the phone down.

He took a freshening shower. Past twelve was a fine time for newspapermen, police and miracle healers to be about their business—did Trancore ever sleep, or had he gone in for all-night sessions?—but Accountancy Branch men worked office hours.

Discreet investigation guaranteed, every cent traced through the best-cooked books. That was probably Washington's line of thought: if Accountancy could do it with embezzled cents, they could do it with elusive fake doctors.

But these cents didn't add up. It didn't make sense.

Nonsense. A whole row of thaumaturgical non-cents.

Accountancy could trace a cent.

So, logically, they could scent a trace. And sense a non-scent . . .

Uh-uh. Pull yourself together, hero . . .

Pake lolled his tongue at the mirror. Clean and pink, no fuzz or sign of civilized costiveness.

Constipation. Post-nasal drip. And leprosy.

He leaned forward until his forehead touched the mirror. His eyes showed red tracery beneath drooping lids. What did real Government men—not the office-bound type—do to stay awake?

Pake recalled Betty's crack about rye and a blonde. And he remembered a nearly full bottle.

He answered the insistent phone with a glass in one hand.

He jotted the address of a cheap rooming house, dressed and left, thoughtfully putting the bottle in a pocket.

THE man on watch said, "Room five. Going in?"

Pake shrugged. "I don't know. If I do, he'll probably float out of a back window. This kind of thing isn't up my alley."

The watcher looked surprised. "Why, you're F.B.I., aren't you?"

"Not so's you'd notice," said Pake gloomily. He shivered a little in the after-midnight chill.

Someone was emerging from the building. The watcher drew Pake into the shadow of an unlighted shop doorway. "It's him, anyway." Then he frowned. "No. Sorry. Same build, but—"

"For my money," Pake murmured, peering across the road, "you were right first time. The norm of a crowd."

"Hey, whadya doing?"

Pake shook off the restraining hand. "I don't know," he said again. "Ask him for a light, maybe. This can't be played according to the Detectives' Manual. If there is such a thing. I wouldn't know. If he vanishes in a puff of smoke, call the psychiatric ward ambulance—for me."

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Pake's lanky strides quickly overtook the slow-moving man.

"Pardon me—"

The man turned. "Good morning, Mr. Pake. I congratulate you on your acuity of perception and your imagination. How are your nasal passages?"

The world reeled a little on its axis.

"Walk with me," said Trancore, and took Pake's arm. "But first signal to your policeman that he needn't follow us."

Frankie Pake flapped a limp, dismissing hand at the watcher in the shadows, and walked on into a dream.

"Am I mad?" he asked simply, after a while.

"No. You're saner than most. Your higher cortical centers are momentarily dulled by fatigue and alcohol, giving full reign to intuition. 'Hunch' you term it. An endearing quality when allied with imagination. A saving grace, indeed, of your race."

"You're from India?"

"Trancore is a good Indian name. Incidentally, fatigue is a disease."

Pake said, "Don't cure me; I couldn't bear to wake up. When do we start running like hell to stay in the same place? Pardon me."

Trancore shook his head as Pake, still walking, upended a bottle to his lips. The sidewalk was crowding up and the lights brightening in nagging neon as they neared Broadway.

Pake lowered the bottle. "You still here?"

"You expect me to disappear? I could, quite easily, by convincing you of my non-presence, as I did when I walked past those men outside my office. Or I could slip into a crowd and, within limitations, alter the apparent cast of my features to conform seemingly with an average. But don't you want to ask me some questions?"

Pake pondered this. "Maybe I do. Why do you want to answer them?" He was feeling less like a real G-man and more like an Accountancy Branch investigator every moment. "You figure I'm harmless, huh?" he added resentfully. "Like my wife?"

"By no means. If I weren't about to conclude my own particular investigation, I would say that you were most dangerous to me. Your imagination is quite highly developed."

Pake stopped. He grabbed Trancore's sleeve. "I can't walk and think," he announced. He dumped the empty bottle by a fire-plug.

THEY sat on high stools in the garish light of an open-fronted soft-drinks bar.

"If this is going to be a jag," Pake said, "I suggest we lay a foundation of milk."

Smells wafted in from the street, the delicate and the insistent inter-

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mingled: rubber, hot oil, burned gasoline, cheap perfume, sweat, dust, peppermint: astringent tang of warm steel, of leather, even of stone. It had been a hot day before the sun went down.

Pake sniffed appreciatively.

"It's a sense we abuse and neglect," he said as the milk was served. "You did cure my post-nasal drip, didn't you?"

Trancore had been watching him with a half-smile. "All those questions in your mind, yet you relish this rediscovery above all. I don't despair of you." Trancore sipped his milk. "The infection was cured by your body. I helped. I can't tell you how, unless you have five hundred years to spare."

"Hardly," Pake said. "I haven't twelve hours to spare, if I'm to save my job. Or my reputation. Which, or either, I'm not sure." He caught Trancore's amused eye. "All right, that's not true. But I need answers to a pretty lengthy questionnaire. Who, when, what, why, where—you know."

"You're convinced I'm a telepath?"

"Aren't you?"

"Not in your sense of the term, which is a semantic misnomer in any case. As a diagnostician, I sense abnormalities in physiological functioning. As a psychologist, I sense —difference. In purpose and function. When you came into my waiting room, I knew you were not there as a patient. Your presence was a disharmony. The same with your colleagues. As for your name and your occupation, they are naturally blazed so clearly on the surface of your mind that even your native clairvoyants could read the information."

"That," Pake breathed, "takes a load off my mind. You don't, for instance, know what I'm thinking about that dark-haired ex-blonde who just served us those shakes?"

"The one with the excellent pectoral development? No. Your own muzzy picturate and thalamic concepts are your own. I can't interpret them."

Pake said, "Fine. You know all about the aphrodisiac effects of alcohol, though. Are you too big for me to understand, or can I see you clear and self-explanatory against the background of Broadway?"

Trancore did not reply for a moment. He was looking at the

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other occupants of the bar. There was something like pity in his eyes. Not pity, though, Pake decided, searching hard for another word. Something bigger; less human, perhaps. Or more human. Compassion?

Trancore said, as if to himself,

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"The girl with the bright face laughing at the febrile witticisms of her unpleasant escort: three-quarters of her right lung has gone."

Pake felt he was overhearing something he shouldn't. But he said, "You could put her right?"

"I could stop the rot in that lung, Pake. But she would return to that back room full of smoke and dust. She would still travel on a crowded subway to an overheated office. She'd still starve herself to buy clothes to keep in fashion. I don't have a cure for those things."

"That's the first time you've admitted you have a cure for anything."

Frankie Pake felt confused, despite his acceptance of the situation—which still surprised him. And he felt grudgingly humble. He saw, as if for the first time, the face of the man who called himself Trancore.

It had been the norm of the crowd, a pale blur in a flashlight shot of a moving mob. Now it was individual, seen clear and not through a wavering mask. The underlying personality was revealed, strong, but with no desire for domination.

There were those once-precious pulps that Betty had scornfully banished to an out-of-the-way cupboard when they'd moved into the apartment. Clues there, maybe? Mutant superman in hiding? Spy from a far galaxy?—ouch! No ray-guns, no squirming, tentacled horrors, no—

A little sanity, a little sobriety, little hero . . .

"What are you, Mr. Trancore?"

"A healer. That is my profession."

"And now suppose you answer the question."

"Is your head clear?"

PAKE, remembering the rye, said, "Strangely, it is. But I'm a little drunk from the neck down, and the dream-state persists."

"I wish," said Trancore—and it seemed the most foolish, yet the most significant thing that Pake could remember hearing him say—"I wish sometimes that I could escape reality so easily, by imparting to it the patina of a dream. You all do that." He got up. "I'm going to work now. I have about eight hours. You will be my guide."

"What do you want to see?"

"This city at play in the predawn hours."

Pake gave a humorful grunt. "My wife would suit you better in the role of guide. She's playing pretty hard right now."

He explained. He *wanted* to explain. Betty was suddenly vivid in his mind: beautiful but fretful, at odds with life, yearning for the opiate of soft lights and sweet music, afraid to face herself, afraid to proclaim her interest in humanity in case such a generalized belief should hurt her in some way.

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Trancore listened sympathetically as Pake spoke of the broken date and his own preference for the quiet life.

Trancore said, "Surely she'll appreciate the irony of this when you tell her?"

"The hell she will! If she knows I've been painting the town without her, even in line of duty—"

Trancore asked, "Do you know where she's likely to be?"

Pake looked at him curiously. "There's a couple of spots she fancies."

"Could we go there a little later?" He held up his hand as Pake was about to veto the idea. "I promise you there'll be no unpleasant consequences if we meet her."

Pake believed him. Pake would have believed in a panhandling green hippo with puce spots at that moment. The apparition would have been absorbed without comment into the basic fantasy of this situation.

THEY started at Brondine's, where it was boasted that any potable man had ever devised for the delectation of palate and the drugging of senses could be served —with second choice on the house if first choice wasn't in stock.

Trancore asked for the first twelve favorites, took them in turn without a blink.

Pake stuck to rye, watched, and listened.

"Your palates," observed Trancore, "are more civilized than your minds."

"But why," asked Pake in wonderment, "are you still upright?"

"I make sure to eliminate the poisons in the alcohol, and thus the toxic effects. As a rule, I don't drug. But when in Rome—"

Something lit up in Pake's mind. Fantasy came to fantasy. He remembered a story. "Now I get it. You're from the future!"

Trancore laughed, genuinely. "Your imagination deserves something better than comic strips to work on. It's fascinating, but depressing, to see science negated by superstition, and your concept of time is the greatest superstition. Let's go. A game shop next."

He meant a pinball arcade.

He cheated abominably. Pake watched a steel ball bump the thousand pin twenty times, defying gravity. "Surgical manipulative technique," Trancore murmured.

A strabismic attendant, called by the clanging of the surfeited machine, shouldered through the matching crowd and squinted unbelievingly.

"Whatcha doon?" The attendant demanded menacingly.

"Or this," Trancore said gently. "The same technique."

The man pressed a hand to his eyes and made an animal noise. Then he looked at his fingers, held up one, two, three; blinked at the lights.

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Pake grasped Trancore's arm, pulled him outside. He was suddenly quite sober. There was a strange harshness in his voice.

"Do you have to impress me? The world needs your knowledge and"—he waved at the glitter of Broadway—"you fritter time and energy mooching around here. You don't cure a girl of T.B., but you fix that old thug's squint."

"A whim. Alone, I can do so little."

"Why do you do anything?"

TRANCORE fingered a green bill reflectively. "Even a healer must eat. Field research is expensive. And we are pledged to live as far as possible within the framework of the society we examine, applying our skills to that end. In that way, we reduce the possibility of observation affecting the subject we observe.

"By using the hypnotic and telekinetic techniques which I have developed in my own profession, I could obviously earn sufficient of your tokens for subsistence during my period of study by gambling, for instance; but that would not be ethical."

Pake imagined a poker player who not only reshuffled cards as they were being dealt to him, but who could disappear, if his opponents queried his success, by erasing the fact of his presence from their minds.

"You could teach—" he began.

"And run foul of the witch-doctors who briefed you yesterday? Think, Mr. Pake! Would you give a hypodermic and a gallon of cocaine to an aboriginal tribe suffering from toothaches? Besides, these techniques have taken me five hundred years to learn."

"That's why I thought—"

"That I was from the future? I might be, in terms of possibility. We are," said Trancore, "no older than you, as a race, in terms of universal evolution. But as individuals, we are longer-lived. The biggest single advance you will make as a race will be when you increase the life-span of the individual."

Pake thought that over, and fantasy was far from his mind.

"You could help us," he said.

"We may, when you become more than ephemerate. And, for psychological reasons, that must be achieved by your own efforts."

"Are we so contemptible?"

"Would we study you if you were? Our architects, our musicians, even our fiction writers do field-work in this territory, write scholarly theses when they return. Anthropology, in our sense of the term, embraces all the arts and sciences. We are all scholars. Occasionally we innovate, and you benefit."

"Why do you tell me this?"

Trancore shrugged. For the first time, Pake noticed that they were standing in the middle of a busy

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sidewalk. They might have been in the middle of the Gobi desert for all the notice people took of them. A plump man walked straight toward them, frowned, then detoured carefully around the spot where they stood. Pake wondered what the man thought he saw. Probably a puddle or broken-up sidewalk.

"I like you," Trancore said simply. "And you will remember very little that you can impart to others and expect any measure of belief. And you have imagination enough to control your terrestrial chauvinism and your natural resentment at being studied. It may comfort you to know that, in the physical sciences, your race is considered to be quite well advanced."

It did, somehow. Yet—

ALL the niggling, back-mind-biting inferiorities that man has ever suffered, from the time he was first chased by a sabertooth to his feeling of helplessness when science outran his emotional control, suddenly seemed to crowd together into Pake's brain for a staggering second.

"Resentment isn't the word," Pake said slowly. "I could kill you."

"But you won't. Others would. Now you understand why our visits are unannounced. And they will remain so until all men are as essentially civilized—that is to say, non-aggressive—as you are."

Pake knew the question was really unimportant and that its true answer would be incomprehensible, anyway. But he asked it.

Trancore smiled. "Your preoccupation with the physical sciences . . . No, I don't have a spaceship garaged anywhere. Your popular concept of time may be superstition, but the limiting speed of light is not. We don't travel. We arrive. I'm afraid the distinction is not clear to you, but it will have to do.

"And now—" The slender man took Pake's arm. Crowds brushed against them again. "Quick visits to a burlesque show, an all-night cinema. And perhaps we could look in at those nightclubs where your wife might be. I owe you a favor. Then I must return home."

They cabbed to three clubs before they found Betty.

"You are not members, we are booked up, it is evening dress only," objected the hastily summoned manager.

"Are you mad?" asked Trancore pleasantly. "Or is your memory so very short?"

The manager thumb-and-fingered his eyes, then beamed at them.

"Good evening, gentlemen. Good to see you again. This way."

"Teach me that trick," muttered Pake as they followed him.

He looked down at his open overcoat and tweed suit.

"Tell me, am I wearing a soft shirt or a boiled one?"

"Boiled."

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"Good. I like to be formal."

Trancore stopped at the entrance to the big circular room. The manager left them and hurried back to his private office with the conviction of a frantic headache to be numbed with aspirin immediately.

"Do you see her?" Trancore asked.

Pake glanced around the soft-lit tables. He looked hard at one table. He made a wry face.

"Boiled," he said, "has more than one meaning. Or maybe Betty just can't resist using that torso of hers as a prop. I wish she wasn't wearing that dress at that angle of inclination. Would you think me so uncivilized, Trancore, if I walked up and poked Football Shoulders in one of those roving eyes of his?"

"You are not altogether without blame in this arisement," Trancore observed mildly. "You make insufficient allowance for her. You are reasonably well-adjusted. She is not."

"I'd like to adjust that damned dress."

"Primitive possessiveness. You disappoint me, Pake," Trancore said, but his eyes were laughing.

Betty looked up as they approached. Her eyes weren't quite focused. "Frankie . . . What the hell! Lookit what the river washed up!"

She grabbed the table for support as Football Shoulders rose suddenly, rubbed his forehead. "Phone call or—or something," he muttered. "Pardon me. Must go."

Betty did a double-take like a puppet as the shoulders lumbered off. "Wheel me home. What goes—"

Pake said, "Meet Mr. Trancore."

TWO men walked slowly along the footpath of a great girdered bridge. The taller man had a hesitation in his walk and stooped a little, as if burdened.

Halfway across, they stopped and watched in silence the slow dawn rose-gilding the towers of Manhattan.

A tugboat below, looking no larger than a water beetle, made its loud, self-important noise. As much noise as an ocean-going liner.

Pake had put Betty in a cab, had walked with Trancore, had asked many more questions, and learned very little. Now he asked the final question as Trancore turned and held out his slender hand.

"Good-by, Mr. Pake."

"At least tell me—which star?"

"You haven't seen or named it yet. Take care of Mr. Trancore for me, won't you? You'll find his address in this pocket. Good-by."

Pake took the hand. For a crazy moment, despite what he knew, he expected it to be withdrawn from his grasp suddenly, to see a figure drawn heavenward along a lancing path of light.

But there was merely a sigh from the lips of the slender man, who

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collapsed limply into Pake's ready arms.

PAKE told his chief, "Those quacks can examine him until they drive the poor devil crazy, but he won't be able to tell them any more. His name is Chandra Trancore, a second-rate doctor who disappeared from his practice in Madras province ten months ago. He has less idea of what he has been doing during those months than they have."

"How do you explain it?"

Pake stood by the window of the office and inhaled deeply. Somewhere nearby there was a window-box with gardenias. He caught their scent as well as if they had been under his nose.

He said, "I don't. And I'd like you to hurry through my resignation as fast as you can, chief."

"I still don't understand why, Frankie. We're pals, aren't we, apart from official status? I know I've had to drive you hard lately. Had to drive myself, too. Sorry I put you on this off-routine stunt. But if you want to rest up for a while—"

Pake inhaled again, audibly. Someone was cooking spaghetti bolognese quite a distance away. "I want to be free to take legal action on behalf of Trancore if those witch-doctors have him arrested on some trumped-up charge just to give themselves more time to examine him. I'll take personal responsibility for seeing him home to India."

"You can do that without resigning. I'll fix special leave, if you insist on being crazy."

"That's not all, though." Pake wondered how he could explain, regretfully decided it was impossible. "I'm taking an intensive two-year course for a new career."

"So you told me. I thought you were drunk. Anyway, how will Betty take to a fool idea like that? She goes for the bright lights, doesn't she? And I thought her—nerves were edgy."

"She's all for it," Pake said, and was amused at his chief's gape-mouthed disbelief. "A neurosis is a disease. And she met Trancore. I'll send you a card when we get started."

THE card arrived three years later. It was headed:

M'Beli Medical Mission Station
Upper Congo

Pake wrote: ". . . probably the most backward tribe mentally and physically in the whole of Africa. Some trouble from the witch-doctors at first, but I've settled down quite nicely now and I think they're beginning to trust me, with Betty's help. The women love her. Tribal customs are fascinating. Watch out for my name in the *Anthropological Review.*"

—PETER PHILLIPS

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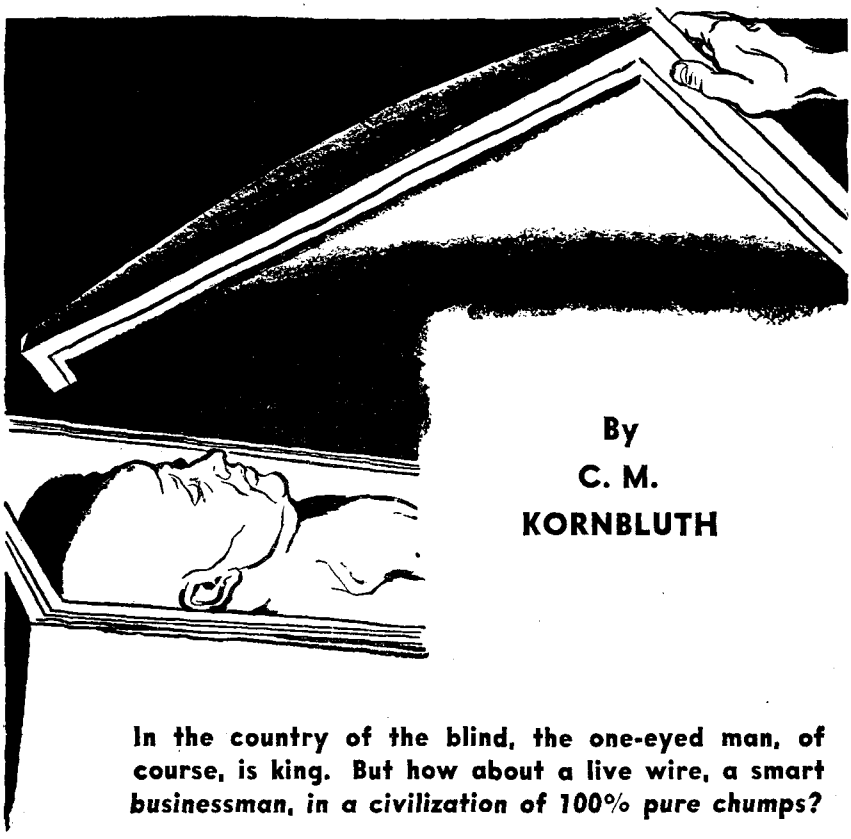
The Marching Morons



By
C. M.
KORNBLUTH

In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man, of course, is king. But how about a live wire, a smart *businessman, in a civilization of 100% pure chumps?*

Illustrated by DON SIBLEY

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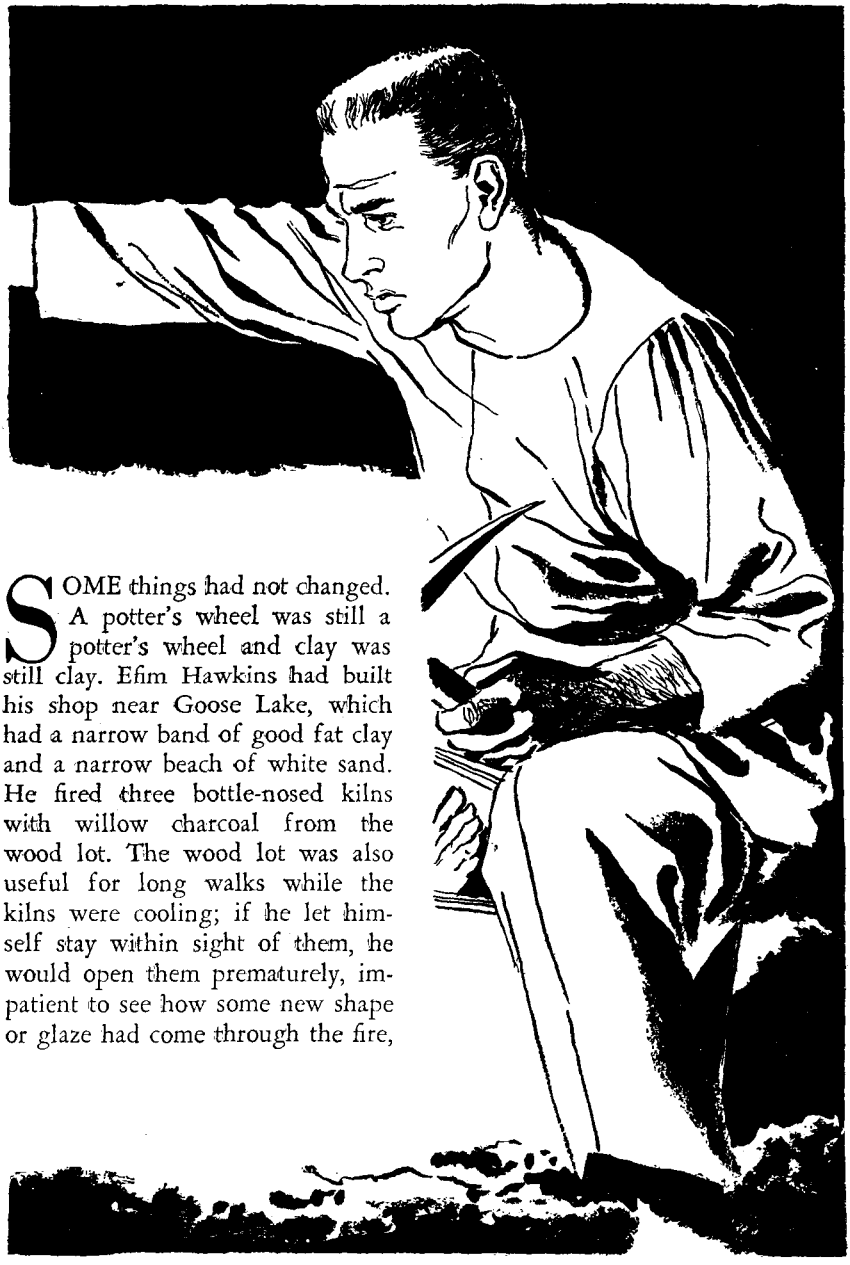

SOME things had not changed. A potter's wheel was still a potter's wheel and clay was still clay. Efim Hawkins had built his shop near Goose Lake, which had a narrow band of good fat clay and a narrow beach of white sand. He fired three bottle-nosed kilns with willow charcoal from the wood lot. The wood lot was also useful for long walks while the kilns were cooling; if he let himself stay within sight of them, he would open them prematurely, impatient to see how some new shape or glaze had come through the fire,

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and—*ping!*—the new shape or glaze would be good for nothing but the shard pile back of his slip tanks.

A business conference was in full swing in his shop, a modest cube of brick, tile-roofed, as the Chicago-Los Angeles "rocket" thundered overhead—very noisy, very swept-back, very fiery jets, shaped as sleekly swift-looking as an airborne barracuda.

The buyer from Marshall Fields was turning over a black-glazed one liter carafe, nodding approval with his massive, handsome head. "This is real pretty," he told Hawkins and his own secretary, Gomez-Laplace. "This has got lots of what ya call real est'etic principles. Yeah, it is real pretty."

"How much?" the secretary asked the potter.

"Seven-fifty each in dozen lots," said Hawkins. "I ran up fifteen dozen last month."

"They are real est'etic," repeated the buyer from Fields. "I will take them all."

"I don't think we can do that, doctor," said the secretary. "They'd cost us $1,350. That would leave only $532 in our quarter's budget. And we still have to run down to East Liverpool to pick up some cheap dinner sets."

"Dinner sets?" asked the buyer, his big face full of wonder.

"Dinner sets. The department's been out of them for two months now. Mr. Garvy-Seabright got pretty nasty about it yesterday. Remember?"

"Garvy-Seabright, that meat-headed bluenose," the buyer said contemptuously. "He don't know nothin' about est'etics. Why for don't he lemme run my own department?" His eye fell on a stray copy of *Whambozambo Comix* and he sat down with it. An occasional deep chuckle or grunt of surprise escaped him as he turned the pages.

Uninterrupted, the potter and the buyer's secretary quickly closed a deal for two dozen of the liter carafes. "I wish we could take more," said the secretary, "but you heard what I told him. We've had to turn away customers for ordinary dinnerware because he shot the last quarter's budget on some Mexican piggy banks some equally enthusiastic importer stuck him with. The fifth floor is packed solid with them."

"I'll bet they look mighty est'etic."

"They're painted with purple cacti."

THE potter shuddered and caressed the glaze of the sample carafe.

The buyer looked up and rumbled, "Ain't you dummies through yakkin' yet? What good's a seckertary for if'n he don't take the burden of *de*-tail off'n my back, harh?"

"We're all through, doctor. Are you ready to go?"

The buyer grunted peevishly,

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dropped *Whambozambo Comix* on the floor and led the way out of the building and down the log corduroy road to the highway. His car was waiting on the concrete. It was, like all contemporary cars, too low-slung to get over the logs. He climbed down into the car and started the motor with a tremendous sparkle and roar.

"Gomez-Laplace," called out the potter under cover of the noise, "did anything come of the radiation program they were working on the last time I was on duty at the Pole?"

"The same old fallacy," said the secretary gloomily. "It stopped us on mutation, it stopped us on culling, it stopped us on segregation, and now it's stopped us on hypnosis."

"Well, I'm scheduled back to the grind in nine days. Time for another firing right now. I've got a new luster to try . . ."

"I'll miss you. I shall be 'vacationing'—running the drafting room of the New Century Engineering Corporation in Denver. They're going to put up a two hundred-story office building, and naturally somebody's got to be on hand."

"Naturally," said Hawkins with a sour smile.

There was an ear-piercingly sweet blast as the buyer leaned on the horn button. Also, a yard-tall jet of what looked like flame spurted up from the car's radiator cap: the car's power plant was a gas turbine, and had no radiator.

"I'm coming, doctor," said the secretary dispiritedly. He climbed down into the car and it whooshed off with much flame and noise.

The potter, depressed, wandered back up the corduroy road and contemplated his cooling kilns. The rustling wind in the boughs was obscuring the creak and mutter of the shrinking refractory brick. Hawkins wondered about the number two kiln—a reduction fire on a load of lusterware mugs. Had the clay chinking excluded the air? Had it been a properly smoky blaze? Would it do any harm if he just took one close—?

COMMON sense took Hawkins by the scruff of the neck and yanked him over to the tool shed. He got out his pick and resolutely set off on a prospecting jaunt to a hummocky field that might yield some oxides. He was especially low on coppers.

The long walk left him sweating hard, with his lust for a peek into the kiln quiet in his breast. He swung his pick almost at random into one of the hummocks; it clanged on a stone which he excavated. A largely obliterated inscription said:

ERSITY OF CHIC
OGICAL LABO
ELOVED MEMORY OF
KILLED IN ACT

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The potter swore mildly. He had hoped the field would turn out to be a cemetery, preferably a once-fashionable cemetery full of once-massive bronze caskets moldered into oxides of tin and copper.

WELL, hell, maybe there was some around anyway.

He headed lackadaisically for the second largest hillock and sliced into it with his pick. There was a stone to undercut and topple into a trench, and then the potter was very glad he'd stuck at it. His nostrils were filled with the bitter smell and the dirt was tinged with the exciting blue of copper salts. The pick went *clang!*

Hawkins, puffing, pried up a stainless steel plate that was quite badly stained and was also marked with incised letters. It seemed to have pulled loose from rotting bronze; there were rivets on the back that brought up flakes of green patina. The potter wiped off the surface dirt with his sleeve, turned it to catch the sunlight obliquely and read:

"HONEST JOHN BARLOW

"Honest John," famed in university annals, represents a challenge which medical science has not yet answered: revival of a human being accidentally thrown into a state of suspended animation.

In 1988 Mr. Barlow, a leading Evanston real estate dealer, visited his dentist for treatment of an impacted wisdom tooth. His dentist requested and received permission to use the experimental anesthetic Cycloparadimethanol-B-7, developed at the University.

After administration of the anesthetic, the dentist resorted to his drill. By freakish mischance, a short circuit in his machine delivered 220 volts of 60-cycle current into the patient. (In a damage suit instituted by Mrs. Barlow against the dentist, the University and the makers of the drill, a jury found for the defendants.) Mr. Barlow never got up from the dentist's chair and was assumed to have died of poisoning, electrocution or both.

Morticians preparing him for embalming discovered, however, that their subject was—though certainly not living—just as certainly not dead. The University was notified and a series of exhaustive tests was begun, including attempts to duplicate the trance state on volunteers. After a bad run of seven cases which ended fatally, the attempts were abandoned.

Honest John was long an exhibit at the University museum, and livened many a football game as mascot of the University's Blue Crushers. The bounds of taste were overstepped, however, when a pledge to Sigma Delta Chi was ordered in '03 to "kidnap" Honest John from his loosely guarded glass museum case and introduce him into the Rachel Swanson Memorial Girls' Gymnasium shower room.

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On May 22nd, 2003, the University Board of Regents issued the following order: "By unanimous vote, it is directed that the remains of Honest John Barlow be removed from the University museum and conveyed to the University's Lieutenant James Scott III Memorial Biological Laboratories and there be securely locked in a specially prepared vault. It is further directed that all possible measures for the preservation of these remains be taken by the Laboratory administration and that access to these remains be denied to all persons except qualified scholars authorized in writing by the Board. The Board reluctantly takes this action in view of recent notices and photographs in the nation's press which, to say the least, reflect but small credit upon the University."

IT WAS far from his field, but Hawkins understood what had happened—an early and accidental blundering onto the bare bones of the Levantman shock anesthesia, which had since been replaced by other methods. To bring subjects out of Levantman shock, you let them have a squirt of simple saline in the trigeminal nerve. Interesting. And now about that bronze—

He heaved the pick into the rotting green salts, expecting no resistence, and almost fractured his wrist. *Something* down there was *solid*. He began to flake off the oxides.

A half hour of work brought h. down to phosphor bronze, a huge casting of the almost incorruptible metal. It had weakened structurally over the centuries; he could fit the point of his pick under a corroded boss and pry off great creaking and grumbling striae of the stuff.

Hawkins wished he had an archeologist with him, but didn't dream of returning to his shop and calling one to take over the find. He was an all-around man: by choice and in his free time, an artist in clay and glaze; by necessity, an automotive, electronics and atomic engineer who could also swing a project in traffic control, individual and group psychology, architecture or tool design. He didn't yell for a specialist every time something out of his line came up; there were so few with so much to do . . .

He trenched around his find, discovering that it was a great brick-shaped bronze mass with an excitingly hollow sound. A long strip of moldering metal from one of the long vertical faces pulled away, exposing red rust that went *whoosh* and was sucked into the interior of the mass.

It had been de-aired, thought Hawkins, and there must have been an inner jacket of glass which had crystalized through the centuries and quietly crumbled at the first clang of his pick. He didn't know what a vacuum would do to a subject of Levantman shock, but he had hopes, nor did he quite under-

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stand what a real estate dealer was, but it might have something to do with pottery. And *anything* might have a bearing on Topic Number One.

HE FLUNG his pick out of the trench, climbed out and set off at a dog-trot for his shop. A little rummaging turned up a hypo and there was a plasticontainer of salt in the kitchen.

Back at his dig, he chipped for another half hour to expose the juncture of lid and body. The hinges were hopeless; he smashed them off.

Hawkins extended the telescopic handle of the pick for the best leverage, fitted its point into a deep pit, set its built-in fulcrum, and heaved. Five more heaves and he could see, inside the vault, what looked like a dusty marble statue. Ten more and he could see that it was the naked body of Honest John Barlow, Evanston real estate dealer, uncorrupted by time.

The potter found the apex of the trigeminal nerve with his needle's point and gave him 60 cc.

In an hour Barlow's chest began to pump.

In another hour, he rasped, "Did it work?"

"*Did* it!" muttered Hawkins.

Barlow opened his eyes and stirred, looked down, turned his hands before his eyes—

"I'll sue!" he screamed. "My clothes! My fingernails!" A horrid suspicion came over his face and he clapped his hands to his hairless scalp. "My hair!" he wailed. "I'll sue you for every penny you've got! That release won't mean a damned thing in court—I didn't sign away my hair and clothes and fingernails!"

"They'll grow back," said Hawkins casually. "Also your epidermis. Those parts of you weren't alive, you know, so they weren't preserved like the rest of you. I'm afraid the clothes are gone, though."

"What is this—the University hospital?" demanded Barlow. "I want a phone. No, you phone. Tell my wife I'm all right and tell Sam Immerman—he's my lawyer—to get over here right away. Greenleaf 7-4022. Ow!" He had tried to sit up, and a portion of his pink skin rubbed against the inner surface of the casket, which was powdered by the ancient crystalized glass. "What the hell did you guys do, boil me alive? Oh, you're going to pay for this!"

"You're all right," said Hawkins, wishing now he had a reference book to clear up several obscure terms. "Your epidermis will start growing immediately. You're not in the hospital. Look here."

HE HANDED Barlow the stainless steel plate that had labeled the casket. After a suspicious glance, the man started to read. Finishing, he laid the plate

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carefully on the edge of the vault and was silent for a spell.

"Poor Verna," he said at last. "It doesn't say whether she was stuck with the court costs. Do you happen to know—"

"No," said the potter. "All I know is what was on the plate, and how to revive you. The dentist accidentally gave you a dose of what we call Levantman shock anesthesia. We haven't used it for centuries; it was powerful, but too dangerous."

"Centuries . . ." brooded the man. "Centuries . . . I'll bet Sam swindled her out of her eyeteeth. Poor Verna. How long ago was it? What year is this?"

Hawkins shrugged. "We call it 7-B-936. That's no help to you. It takes a long time for these metals to oxidize."

"Like that movie," Barlow muttered. "Who would have thought it? Poor Verna!" He blubbered and sniffled, reminding Hawkins powerfully of the fact that he had been found under a flat rock.

Almost angrily, the potter demanded, "How many children did you have?"

"None yet," sniffed Barlow. "My first wife didn't want them. But Verna wants one—wanted one—but we're going to wait until—we *were* going to wait until—"

"Of course," said the potter, feeling a savage desire to tell him off, blast him to hell and gone for his work. But he choked it down. There was The Problem to think of; there was always The Problem to think of, and this poor blubberer might unexpectedly supply a clue. Hawkins would have to pass him on.

"COME along," Hawkins said. "My time is short."

Barlow looked up, outraged. "How can you be so unfeeling? I'm a human being like—"

The Los Angeles-Chicago "rocket" thundered overhead and Barlow broke off in mid-complaint. "Beautiful!" he breathed, following it with his eyes. "Beautiful!"

He climbed out of the vault, too interested to be pained by its roughness against his infantile skin. "After all," he said briskly, "this should have its sunny side. I never was much for reading, but this is just like one of those stories. And I ought to make some money out of it, shouldn't I?" He gave Hawkins a shrewd glance.

"You want money?" asked the potter. "Here." He handed over a fistful of change and bills. "You'd better put my shoes on. It'll be about a quarter-mile. Oh, and you're—uh, modest?—yes, that was the word. Here." Hawkins gave him his pants, but Barlow was excitedly counting the money.

"Eighty-five, eighty-six—and it's dollars, too! I thought it'd be credits or whatever they call them. 'E Pluribus Unum' and 'Liberty'—just different faces. Say, is there a catch to this? Are these real, genuine,

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honest twenty-two-cent dollars like we had or just wallpaper?"

"They're quite all right, I assure you," said the potter. "I wish you'd come along. I'm in a hurry."

THE man babbled as they stumped toward the shop. "Where are we going—The Council of Scientists, the World Coordinator or something like that?"

"Who? Oh, no. We call them 'President' and 'Congress.' No, that wouldn't do any good at all. I'm just taking you to see some people."

"I ought to make plenty out of this. *Plenty!* I could write books. Get some smart young fellow to put it into words for me and I'll bet I could turn out a best-seller. What's the setup on things like that?"

"It's about like that. Smart young fellows. But there aren't any best-sellers any more. People don't read much nowadays. We'll find something equally profitable for you to do."

Back in the shop, Hawkins gave Barlow a suit of clothes, deposited him in the waiting room and called Central in Chicago. "Take him away," he pleaded. "I have time for one more firing and he blathers and blathers. I haven't told him anything. Perhaps we should just turn him loose and let him find his own level, but there's a chance—"

"The Problem," agreed Central. "Yes, there's a chance."

The potter delighted Barlow by making him a cup of coffee with a cube that not only dissolved in cold water but heated the water to boiling point. Killing time, Hawkins chatted about the "rocket" Barlow had admired, and had to haul himself up short; he had almost told the real estate man what its top speed really was—almost, indeed, revealed that it was not a rocket.

He regretted, too, that he had so casually handed Barlow a couple of hundred dollars. The man seemed obsessed with fear that they were worthless since Hawkins refused to take a note or I.O.U. or even a definite promise of repayment. But Hawkins couldn't go into details, and was very glad when a stranger arrived from Central.

"Tinny-Peete, from Algeciras," the stranger told him swiftly as the two of them met at the door. "Psychist for Poprob. Polasigned special overtake Barlow."

"Thank Heaven," said Hawkins. "Barlow," he told the man from the past, "this is Tinny-Peete. He's going to take care of you and help you make lots of money."

The psychist stayed for a cup of the coffee whose preparation had delighted Barlow, and then conducted the real estate man down the corduroy road to his car, leaving the potter to speculate on whether he could at last crack his kilns.

Hawkins, abruptly dismissing Barlow and the Problem, happily

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picked the chinking from around the door of the number two kiln, prying it open a trifle. A blast of heat and the heady, smoky scent of the reduction fire delighted him. He peered and saw a corner of a shelf glowing cherry-red, becoming obscured by wavering black areas as it lost heat through the opened door. He slipped a charred wood paddle under a mug on the shelf and pulled it out as a sample, the hairs on the back of his hand curling and scorching. The mug crackled and pinged and Hawkins sighed happily.

The bismuth resinate luster had fired to perfection, a haunting film of silvery-black metal with strange bluish lights in it as it turned before the eyes, and the Problem of Population seemed very far away to Hawkins then.

BARLOW and Tinny-Peete arrived at the concrete highway where the psychist's car was parked in a safety bay.

"What—a—*boat!*" gasped the man from the past.

"Boat? No, that's my car."

Barlow surveyed it with awe. Swept-back lines, deep-drawn compound curves, kilograms of chrome. He ran his hands futilely over the door—or was it the door?—in a futile search for a handle, and asked respectfully, "How fast does it go?"

The psychist gave him a keen look and said slowly, "Two hundred and fifty. You can tell by the speedometer."

"Wow! My old Chevvy could hit a hundred on a straightaway, but you're out of my class, mister!"

Tinny-Peete somehow got a huge, low door open and Barlow descended three steps into immense cushions, floundering over to the right. He was too fascinated to pay serious attention to his flayed dermis. The dashboard was a lovely wilderness of dials, plugs, indicators, lights, scales and switches.

The psychist climbed down into the driver's seat and did something with his feet. The motor started like lighting a blowtorch as big as a silo. Wallowing around in the cushions, Barlow saw through a rear-view mirror a tremendous exhaust filled with brilliant white sparkles.

"Do you like it?" yelled the psychist.

"It's terrific!" Barlow yelled back. "It's—"

He was shut up as the car pulled out from the bay into the road with a great *voo-ooo-ooom!* A gale roared past Barlow's head, though the windows seemed to be closed; the impression of speed was terrific. He located the speedometer on the dashboard and saw it climb past 90, 100, 150, 200.

"Fast enough for me," yelled the psychist, noting that Barlow's face fell in response. "Radio?"

He passed over a surprisingly

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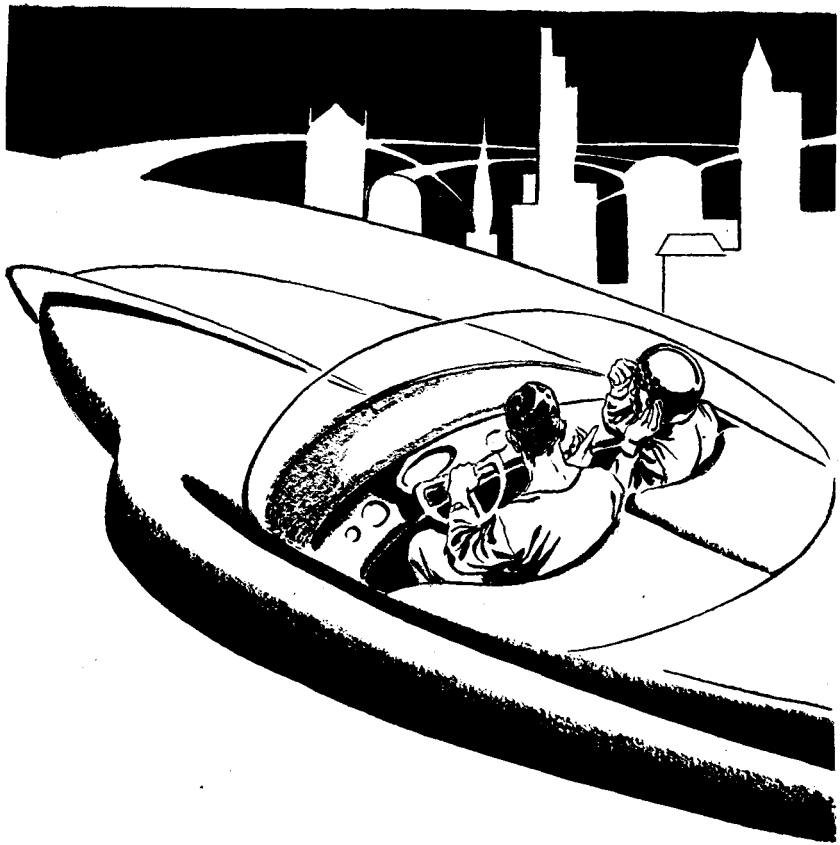

light object like a football helmet, with no trailing wires, and pointed to a row of buttons. Barlow put on the helmet, glad to have the roar of air stilled, and pushed a push-button. It lit up satisfyingly and Barlow settled back even farther for a sample of the brave new world's super-modern taste in ingenious entertainment.

"TAKE IT AND STICK IT!" a voice roared in his ears.

HE SNATCHED off the helmet and gave the psychist an injured look. Tinny-Peete grinned and turned a dial associated with the pushbutton layout. The man from the past donned the helmet again and found the voice had lowered to normal.

"The show of shows! The super-show! The super-duper show! The quiz of quizzes! *Take it and stick it!*"

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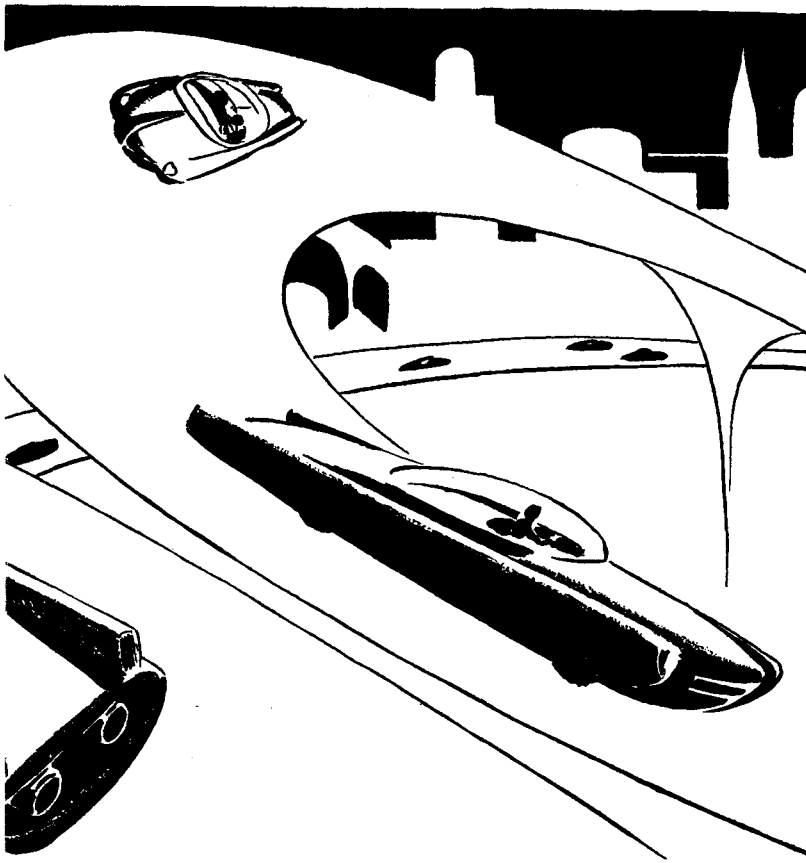

There were shrieks of laughter in the background.

"Here we got the contes-tants all ready to go. You know how we work it. I hand a contes-tant a triangle-shaped cutout and like that down the line. Now we got these here boards, they got cut-out places the same shape as the triangles and things, only they're all different shapes, and the first contes-tant that sticks the cutouts into the board, he wins.

"Now I'm gonna innaview the first contes-tant. Right here, honey. What's your name?"

"Name? Uh—"

"Hoddaya like that, folks? She don't remember her name! Hah? *Would you buy that for a quarter?*" The question was spoken with arch significance, and the au-

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dience shrieked, howled and whistled its appreciation.

It was dull listening when you didn't know the punch lines and catch lines. Barlow pushed another button, with his free hand ready at the volume control.

"—latest from Washington. It's about Senator Hull-Mendoza. He is still attacking the Bureau of Fisheries. The North California Syndicalist says he got affidavits that John Kingsley-Schultz is a bluenose from way back. He didn't publistat the affydavits, but he says they say that Kingsley-Schultz was saw at bluenose meetings in Oregon State College and later at Florida University. Kingsley-Schultz says he gotta confess he did major in fly-casting at Oregon and got his Ph.D. in game-fish at Florida.

"And here is a quote from Kingsley-Schultz: 'Hull-Mendoza don't know what he's talking about. He should drop dead.' Unquote. Hull-Mendoza says he won't publistat the affydavits to pertect his sources. He says they was sworn by three former employes of the Bureau which was fired for in-competence and in-com-pat-ibility by Kingsley-Schultz.

"Elsewhere they was the usual run of traffic accidents. A three-way pileup of cars on Route 66 going outta Chicago took twelve lives. The Chicago-Los Angeles morning rocket crashed and exploded in the Mo-have—Mo-javvy—whatever-you-call-it Desert. All the 94 people aboard got killed. A Civil Aeronautics Authority investigator on the scene says that the pilot was buzzing herds of sheep and didn't pull out in time.

"Hey! Here's a hot one from New York! A Diesel tug run wild in the harbor while the crew was below and shoved in the port bow of the luck-shury liner *S. S. Placentia.* It says the ship filled and sank taking the lives of an es-timated 180 passengers and 50 crew members. Six divers was sent down to study the wreckage, but they died, too, when their suits turned out to be fulla little holes.

"And here is a bulletin I just got from Denver. It seems—"

BARLOW took off the headset uncomprehendingly. "He seemed so callous," he yelled at the driver. "I was listening to a newscast—"

Tinny-Peete shook his head and pointed at his ears. The roar of air was deafening. Barlow frowned baffledly and stared out of the window.

A glowing sign said:

MOOGS!
WOULD YOU BUY IT
FOR A QUARTER?

He didn't know what Moogs was or were; the illustration showed an incredibly proportioned girl, 99.9 per cent naked, writhing passionately in animated full color.

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The roadside jingle was still with him, but with a new feature. Radar or something spotted the car and alerted the lines of the jingle. Each in turn sped along a roadside track, even with the car, so it could be read before the next line was alerted.

IF THERE'S A GIRL
YOU WANT TO GET
DEFLOCCULIZE
UNROMANTIC SWEAT.
"A*R*M*P*I*T*T*O"

Another animated job, in two panels, the familiar "Before and After." The first said, "Just Any Cigar?" and was illustrated with a two-person domestic tragedy of a wife holding her nose while her coarse and red-faced husband puffed a slimy-looking rope. The second panel glowed, "Or a VUELTA ABAJO?" and was illustrated with—

Barlow blushed and looked at his feet until they had passed the sign.

"Coming into Chicago!" bawled Tinny-Peete.

Other cars were showing up, all of them dreamboats.

Watching them, Barlow began to wonder if he knew what a kilometer was, exactly. They seemed to be traveling so slowly, if you ignored the roaring air past your ears and didn't let the speedy lines of the dreamboats fool you. He would have sworn they were really crawling along at twenty-five, with occasional spurts up to thirty. How much was a kilometer, anyway?

The city loomed ahead, and it was just what it ought to be: towering skyscrapers, overhead ramps, landing platforms for helicopters—

He clutched at the cushions. Those two 'copters. They were going to—they were going to—they—

He didn't see what happened because their apparent collision courses took them behind a giant building.

SCREAMINGLY sweet blasts of sound surrounded them as they stopped for a red light. "What the hell is going on here?" said Barlow in a shrill, frightened voice, because the braking time was just about zero, he wasn't hurled against the dashboard. "Who's kidding who?"

"Why, what's the matter?" demanded the driver.

The light changed to green and he started the pickup. Barlow stiffened as he realized that the rush of air past his ears began just a brief, unreal split-second before the car was actually moving. He grabbed for the door handle on his side.

The city grew on them slowly: scattered buildings, denser buildings, taller buildings, and a red light ahead. The car rolled to a stop in zero braking time, the rush of air cut off an instant after it stopped, and Barlow was out of

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the car and running frenziedly down a sidewalk one instant after that.

They'll track me down, he thought, panting. *It's a secret police thing. They'll get you—mind-reading machines, television eyes everywhere, afraid you'll tell their slaves about freedom and stuff. They don't let anybody cross them, like that story I once read.*

Winded, he slowed to a walk and congratulated himself that he had guts enough not to turn around. That was what they always watched for. Walking, he was just another business-suited back among hundreds. He would be safe, he would be safe—

A hand tumbled from a large, coarse, handsome face thrust close to his: "Wassamatta bumpinninna people likeya owna sidewalk gotta miner slamya inna mushya bassar!" It was neither the mad potter nor the mad driver.

"Excuse me," said Barlow. "What did you say?"

"Oh, yeah?" yelled the stranger dangerously, and waited for an answer.

Barlow, with the feeling that he had somehow been suckered into the short end of an intricate land-title deal, heard himself reply belligerently, "Yeah!"

The stranger let go of his shoulder and snarled, "Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah!" said Barlow, yanking his jacket back into shape.

"Aaah!" snarled the stranger, with more contempt and disgust than ferocity. He added an obscenity current in Barlow's time, a standard but physiologically impossible directive, and strutted off hulking his shoulders and balling his fists.

BARLOW walked on, trembling. Evidently he had handled it well enough. He stopped at a red light while the long, low dreamboats roared before him and pedestrains in the sidewalk flow with him threaded their ways through the stream of cars. Brakes screamed, fenders clanged and dented, hoarse cries flew back and forth between drivers and walkers. He leaped backward frantically as one car swerved over an arc of sidewalk to miss another.

The signal changed to green, the cars kept on coming for about thirty seconds and then dwindled to an occasional light-runner. Barlow crossed warily and leaned against a vending machine, blowing big breaths.

Look natural, he told himself. *Do something normal. Buy something from the machine.*

He fumbled out some change, got a newspaper for a dime, a handkerchief for a quarter and a candy bar for another quarter.

The faint chocolate smell made him ravenous suddenly. He clawed at the glassy wrapper printed "CRIGGLIES" quite futilely for a few seconds, and then it divided

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neatly by itself. The bar made three good bites, and he bought two more and gobbled them down.

Thirsty, he drew a carbonated orange drink in another one of the glassy wrappers from the machine for another dime. When he fumbled with it, it divided neatly and spilled all over his knees. Barlow decided he had been there long enough and walked on.

The shop windows were—shop windows. People still wore and bought clothes, still smoked and bought tobacco, still ate and bought food. And they still went to the movies, he saw with pleased surprise as he passed and then returned to a glittering place whose sign said it was THE BIJOU.

The place seemed to be showing a quintuple feature, *Babies Are Terrible, Don't Have Children,* and *The Canali Kid.*

It was irresistible; he paid a dollar and went in.

He caught the tail-end of *The Canali Kid* in three-dimensional, full-color, full-scent production. It appeared to be an interplanetary saga winding up with a chase scene and a reconciliation between estranged hero and heroine. *Babies Are Terrible* and *Don't Have Children* were fantastic arguments against parenthood—the grotesquely exaggerated dangers of painfully graphic childbirth, vicious children, old parents beaten and starved by their sadistic offspring. The audience, Barlow astoundedly noted, was placidly champing sweets and showing no particular signs of revulsion.

The *Coming Attractions* drove him into the lobby. The fanfares were shattering, the blazing colors blinding, and the added scents stomach-heaving.

WHEN his eyes again became accustomed to the moderate lighting of the lobby, he groped his way to a bench and opened the newspaper he had bought. It turned out to be *The Racing Sheet,* which afflicted him with a crushing sense of loss. The familiar boxed index in the lower left hand corner of the front page showed almost unbearably that Churchill Downs and Empire City were still in business—

Blinking back tears, he turned to the Past Performances at Churchill. They weren't using abbreviations any more, and the pages because of that were single-column instead of double. But it was all the same—or was it?

He squinted at the first race, a three-quarter-mile maiden claimer for thirteen hundred dollars. Incredibly, the track record was two minutes, ten and three-fifths seconds. Any beetle in his time could have knocked off the three-quarter in one-fifteen. It was the same for the other distances, much worse for route events.

What the hell had happened to everything?

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He studied the form of a five-year-old brown mare in the second and couldn't make head or tail of it. She'd won and lost and placed and showed and lost and placed without rhyme or reason. She looked like a front-runner for a couple of races and then she looked like a no-good pig and then she looked like a mudder but the next time it rained she wasn't and then she was a stayer and then she was a pig again. In a good five-thousand-dollar allowances event, too!

Barlow looked at the other entries and it slowly dawned on him that they were all like the five-year-old brown mare. Not a single damned horse running had the slightest trace of class.

Somebody sat down beside him and said, "That's the story."

BARLOW whirled to his feet and saw it was tinny-Peete, his driver.

"I was in doubts about telling you," said the psychist, "but I see you have some growing suspicions of the truth. Please don't get excited. It's all right, I tell you."

"So you've got me," said Barlow.

"*Got* you?"

"Don't pretend. I can put two and two together. You're the secret police. You and the rest of the aristocrats live in luxury on the sweat of these oppressed slaves. You're afraid of me because you have to keep them ignorant."

There was a bellow of bright laughter from the psychist that got them blank looks from other patrons of the lobby. The laughter didn't sound at all sinister.

"Let's get out of here," said Tinny-Peete, still chuckling. "You couldn't possibly have it more wrong." He engaged Barlow's arm and led him to the street. "The actual truth is that the millions of workers live in luxury on the sweat of the handful of aristocrats. I shall probably die before my time of overwork unless—" He gave Barlow a speculative look. "You may be able to help us."

"I know that gag," sneered Barlow. "I made money in my time and to make money you have to get people on your side. Go ahead and shoot me if you want, but you're not going to make a fool out of me."

"You nasty little ingrate!" snapped the psychist, with a kaleidoscopic change of mood. "This damned mess is all your fault and the fault of people like you! Now come along and no more of your nonsense."

He yanked Barlow into an office building lobby and an elevator that, disconcertingly, went *whoosh* loudly as it rose. The real estate man's knees were wobbly as the psychist pushed him from the elevator, down a corridor and into an office.

A hawk-faced man rose from a plain chair as the door closed behind them. After an angry look at Barlow, he asked the psychist,

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"Was I called from the Pole to inspect this—this—?"

"Unget updandered. I've deeprobed etfind quasichance exhim Poprobattackline," said the psychist soothingly.

"Doubt," grunted the hawk-faced man.

"Try," suggested Tinny-Peete.

"Very well. Mr. Barlow, I understand you and your lamented had no children."

"What of it?"

"This of it. You were a blind, selfish stupid ass to tolerate economic and social conditions which penalized child-bearing by the prudent and foresighted. You made us what we are today, and I want you to know that we are far from satisfied. Damn-fool rockets! Damn-fool automobiles! Damn-fool cities with overhead ramps!"

"As far as I can see," said Barlow, "you're running down the best features of time. Are you crazy?"

"The rockets aren't rockets. They're turbo-jets—good turbo-jets, but the fancy shell around them makes for a bad drag. The automobiles have a top speed of one hundred kilometers per hour—a kilometer is, if I recall my paleolinguistics, three-fifths of a mile—and the speedometers are all rigged accordingly so the drivers will think they're going two hundred and fifty. The cities are ridiculous, expensive, unsanitary, wasteful conglomerations of people who'd be better off and more productive if they were spread over the countryside.

"We need the rockets and trick speedometers and cities because, while you and your kind were being prudent and foresighted and not having children, the migrant workers, slum dwellers and tenant farmers were shiftlessly and shortsightedly having children—breeding, breeding. My God, how they bred!"

"WAIT a minute," objected Barlow. "There were lots of people in our crowd who had two or three children."

"The attrition of accidents, illness, wars and such took care of that. Your intelligence was bred out. It is gone. Children that should have been born never were. The just-average, they'll-get-along majority took over the population. The average IQ now is 45."

"But that's far in the future—"

"So are you," grunted the hawk-faced man sourly.

"But who are *you* people?"

"Just people—real people. Some generations ago, the geneticists realized at last that nobody was going to pay any attention to what they said, so they abandoned words for deeds. Specifically, they formed and recruited for a closed corporation infended to maintain and improve the breed. We are their descendants, about three million of us. There are five billion of the others, so we are their slaves.

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"During the past couple of years I've designed a skyscraper, kept Billings Memorial Hospital here in Chicago running, headed off war with Mexico and directed traffic at LaGuardia Field in New York."

"I don't understand! Why don't you let them go to hell in their own way?"

The man grimaced. "We tried it once for three months. We holed up at the South Pole and waited. They didn't notice it. Some drafting-room people were missing, some chief nurses didn't show up, minor government people on the non-policy level couldn't be located. It didn't seem to matter.

"In a week there was hunger. In two weeks there were famine and plague, in three weeks war and anarchy. We called off the experiment; it took us most of the next generation to get things squared away again."

"But why *didn't* you let them kill each other off?"

"Five billion corpses mean about five hundred million tons of rotting flesh."

Barlow had another idea. "Why don't you sterilize them?"

"Two and one-half billion operations is a lot of operations. Because they breed continuously, the job would never be done."

"I see. Like the marching Chinese!"

"Who the devil are they?"

"It was a—uh—paradox of my time. Somebody figured out that if all the Chinese in the world were to line up four abreast, I think it was, and start marching past a given point, they'd never stop because of the babies that would be born and grow up before they passed the point."

"That's right. Only instead of 'a given point,' make it 'the largest conceivable number of operating rooms that we could build and staff.' There could never be enough."

"Say!" said Barlow. "Those movies about babies—was that your propaganda?"

"It was. It doesn't seem to mean a thing to them. We have abandoned the idea of attempting propaganda contrary to a biological drive."

"So if you work *with* a biological drive—?"

"I know of none which is consistent with inhibition of fertility."

BARLOW'S face went poker-blank, the result of years of careful discipline. "You don't, huh? You're the great brains and you can't think of any?"

"Why, no," said the psychist innocently. "Can you?"

"That depends. I sold ten thousand acres of Siberian tundra—through a dummy firm, of course—after the partition of Russia. The buyers thought they were getting improved building lots on the outskirts of Kiev. I'd say that was a lot tougher than this job."

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"How so?" asked the hawk-faced man.

"Those were normal, suspicious customers and these are morons, born suckers. You just figure out a con they'll fall for; they won't know enough to do any smart checking."

The psychist and the hawk-faced man had also had training; they kept themselves from looking with sudden hope at each other.

"You seem to have something in mind," said the psychist.

Barlow's poker face went blanker still. "Maybe I have. I haven't heard any offer yet."

"There's the satisfaction of knowing that you've prevented Earth's resources from being so plundered," the hawk-faced man pointed out, "that the race will soon become extinct."

"I don't know that," Barlow said bluntly. "All I have is your word."

"If you really have a method, I don't think any price would be too great," the psychist offered.

"Money," said Barlow.

"All you want."

"More than you want," the hawk-faced man corrected.

"Prestige," added Barlow. "Plenty of publicity. My picture and my name in the papers and over TV every day, statues to me, parks and cities and streets and other things named after me. A whole chapter in the history books."

The psychist made a facial sign to the hawk-faced man that meant, "Oh, brother!"

The hawk-faced man signaled back, "Steady, boy!"

"It's not too much to ask," the psychist agreed.

Barlow, sensing a seller's market, said, "Power!"

"Power?" the hawk-faced man repeated puzzledly. "Your own hydro station or nuclear pile?"

"I mean a world dictatorship with me as dictator!"

"Well, now—" said the psychist, but the hawk-faced man interrupted, "It would take a special emergency act of Congress but the situation warrants it. I think that can be guaranteed."

"Could you give us some indication of your plan?" the psychist asked.

"Ever hear of lemmings?"

"No."

"They are—were, I guess, since you haven't heard of them—little animals in Norway, and every few years they'd swarm to the coast and swim out to sea until they drowned. I figure on putting some lemming urge into the population."

"How?"

"I'll save that till I get the right signatures on the deal."

THE hawk-faced man said, "I'd like to work with you on it, Barlow. My name's Ryan-Ngana." He put out his hand.

Barlow looked closely at the

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hand, then at the man's face. "Ryan what?"

"Ngana."

"That sounds like an African name."

"It is. My mother's father was a Watusi."

Barlow didn't take the hand. "I thought you looked pretty dark. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I don't think I'd be at my best working with you. There must be somebody else just as well qualified, I'm sure."

The psychist made a facial sign to Ryan-Ngana that meant, "Steady *yourself,* boy!"

"Very well," Ryan-Ngana told Barlow. "We'll see what arrangement can be made."

"It's not that I'm prejudiced, you understand. Some of my best friends—"

"Mr. Barlow, don't give it another thought. Anybody who could pick on the lemming analogy is going to be useful to us."

And so he would, thought Ryan-Ngana, alone in the office after Tinny-Peete had taken Barlow up to the helicopter stage. So he would. Poprob had exhausted every rational attempt and the new Poprobattacklines would have to be irrational or sub-rational. This creature from the past with his lemming legends and his improved building lots would be a fountain of precious vicious self-interest.

Ryan-Ngana sighed and stretched. He had to go and run the San Francisco subway. Summoned early from the Pole to study Barlow, he'd left unfinished a nice little theorem. Between interruptions, he was slowly constructing an n-dimensional geometry whose foundations and superstructure owed no debt whatsoever to intuition.

UPSTAIRS, waiting for a helicopter, Barlow was explaining to Tinny-Peete that he had nothing against Negroes, and Tinny-Peete wished he had some of Ryan-Ngana's imperturbability and humor for the ordeal.

The helicopter took them to International Airport where, Tinny-Peete explained, Barlow would leave for the Pole.

The man from the past wasn't sure he'd like a dreary waste of ice and cold.

"It's all right," said the psychist. "A civilized layout. Warm, pleasant. You'll be able to work more efficiently there. All the facts at your fingertips, a good secretary—"

"I'll need a pretty big staff," said Barlow, who had learned from thousands of deals never to take the first offer.

"I *meant* a private, confidential one," said Tinny-Peete readily, "but you can have as many as you want. You'll naturally have top-primary-top priority if you really have a workable plan."

"Let's not forget this dictatorship angle," said Barlow.

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He didn't know that the psychist would just as readily have promised him deification to get him happily on the "rocket" for the Pole. Tinny-Peete had no wish to be torn limb from limb; he knew very well that it would end that way if the population learned from this anachronism that there was a small elite which considered itself head, shoulders, trunk and groin above the rest. The fact that this assumption was perfectly true and the fact that the elite was condemned by its superiority to a life of the most grinding toil would not be considered; the difference would.

The psychist finally put Barlow aboard the "rocket" with some thirty people—real people—headed for the Pole.

BARLOW was airsick all the way because of a post-hypnotic suggestion Tinny-Peete had planted in him. One idea was to make him as averse as possible to a return trip, and another idea was to spare the other passengers from his aggressive, talkative company.

Barlow during the first day at the pole was reminded of his first day in the Army. It was the same now-where-the-hell-are-we-going-to-put-*you?* business until he took a firm line with them. Then instead of acting like supply sergeants they acted like hotel clerks.

It was a wonderful, wonderfully calculated buildup, and one that he failed to suspect. After all, in his time a visitor from the past would have been lionized.

At day's end he reclined in a snug underground billet with the 60-mile gales roaring yards overhead, and tried to put two and two together.

It was like old times, he thought—like a coup in real estate where you had the competition by the throat, like a 50-per cent rent boost when you knew damned well there was no place for the tenants to move, like smiling when you read over the breakfast orange juice that the city council had decided to build a school on the ground you had acquired by a deal with the city council. And it was simple. He would just sell tundra building lots to eagerly suicidal lemmings, and that was absolutely all there was to solving the Problem that had these double-domes spinning.

They'd have to work out most of the details, naturally, but what the hell, that was what subordinates were for. He'd need specialists in advertising, engineering, communications—did they know anything about hypnotism? That might be helpful. If not, there'd have to be a lot of bribery done, but he'd make sure—damned sure—there were unlimited funds.

Just selling building lots to lemmings . . .

He wished, as he fell asleep, that poor Verna could have been in on this. It was his biggest, most stu-

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pendous deal. Verna—that sharp shyster Sam Immerman must have swindled her . . .

IT BEGAN the next day with people coming to visit him. He knew the approach. They merely wanted to be helpful to their illustrious visitor from the past and would he help fill them in about his era, which unfortunately was somewhat obscure historically, and what did he think could be done about the Problem? He told them he was too old to be roped any more, and they wouldn't get any information out of him until he got a letter of intent from at least the Polar President, and a session of the Polar Congress empowered to make him dictator.

He got the letter and the session. He presented his program, was asked whether his conscience didn't revolt at its callousness, explained succinctly that a deal was a deal and anybody who wasn't smart enough to protect himself didn't deserve protection—"Caveat emptor," he threw in for scholarship, and had to translate it to "Let the buyer beware." He didn't, he stated, give a damn about either the morons or their intelligent slaves; he'd told them his price and that was all he was interested in.

Would they meet it or wouldn't they?

The Polar President offered to resign in his favor, with certain temporary emergency powers that the Polar Congress would vote him if he thought them necessary. Barlow demanded the title of World Dictator, complete control of world finances, salary to be decided by himself, and the publicity campaign and historical writeup to begin at once.

"As for the emergency powers," he added, "they are neither to be temporary nor limited."

Somebody wanted the floor to discuss the matter, with the declared hope that perhaps Barlow would modify his demands.

"You've got the proposition," Barlow said. "I'm not knocking off even ten per cent."

"But what if the Congress refuses, sir?" the President asked.

"Then you can stay up here at the Pole and try to work it out yourselves. I'll get what I want from the morons. A shrewd operator like me doesn't have to compromise; I haven't got a single competitor in this whole cockeyed moronic era."

Congress waived debate and voted by show of hands. Barlow won unanimously.

"You don't know how close you came to losing me," he said in his first official address to the joint Houses. "I'm not the boy to haggle; either I get what I ask or I go elsewhere. The first thing I want is to see designs for a new palace for me—nothing *un*ostentatious, either—and your best painters and sculptors to start working

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on my portraits and statues. Meanwhile, I'll get my staff together."

He dismissed the Polar President and the Polar Congress, telling them that he'd let them know when the next meeting would be.

A week later, the program started with North America the first target.

Mrs. Garvy was resting after dinner before the ordeal of turning on the dishwasher. The TV, of course, was on and it said: "Oooh!" —long, shuddery and ecstatic, the cue for the *Parfum Assault Criminale* spot commercial. "Girls," said the announcer hoarsely, "do you want your man? It's easy to get him—easy as a trip to Venus."

"Huh?" said Mrs. Garvy.

"Wassamatter?" snorted her husband, starting out of a doze.

"Ja hear that?"

"Wha'?"

"He said 'easy like a trip to Venus.' "

"So?"

"Well, I thought ya couldn't get to Venus. I thought they just had that one rocket thing that crashed on the Moon."

"Aah, women don't keep up with the news," said Garvy righteously, subsiding again.

"Oh," said his wife uncertainly.

And the next day, on *Henry's Other Mistress,* there was a new character who had just breezed in: Buzz Rentshaw, Master Rocket Pilot of the Venus run. On *Henry's Other Mistress,* "the broadcast drama about you and your neighbors, *folksy* people, *ordinary* people, *real* people"! Mrs. Garvy listened with amazement over a cooling cup of coffee as Buzz made hay of her hazy convictions.

MONA: Darling, it's so good to see you again!

BUZZ: You don't know how I've missed you on that dreary Venus run.

SOUND: *Venetian blind run down, key turned in door lock.*

MONA: Was it *very* dull, dearest?

BUZZ: Let's not talk about my humdrum job, darling. Let's talk about us.

SOUND: *Creaking bed.*

Well, the program was back to normal at last. That evening Mrs. Garvy tried to ask again whether her husband was sure about those rockets, but he was dozing right through *Take It and Stick It,* so she watched the screen and forgot the puzzle.

She was still rocking with laughter at the gag line, "Would you buy it for a quarter?" when the commercial went on for the detergent powder she always faithfully loaded her dishwasher with on the first of every month.

THE announcer displayed mountains of suds from a tiny piece of the stuff and coyly added: "Of course, Cleano don't lay around for you to pick up like the soap root on Venus, but it's pretty cheap

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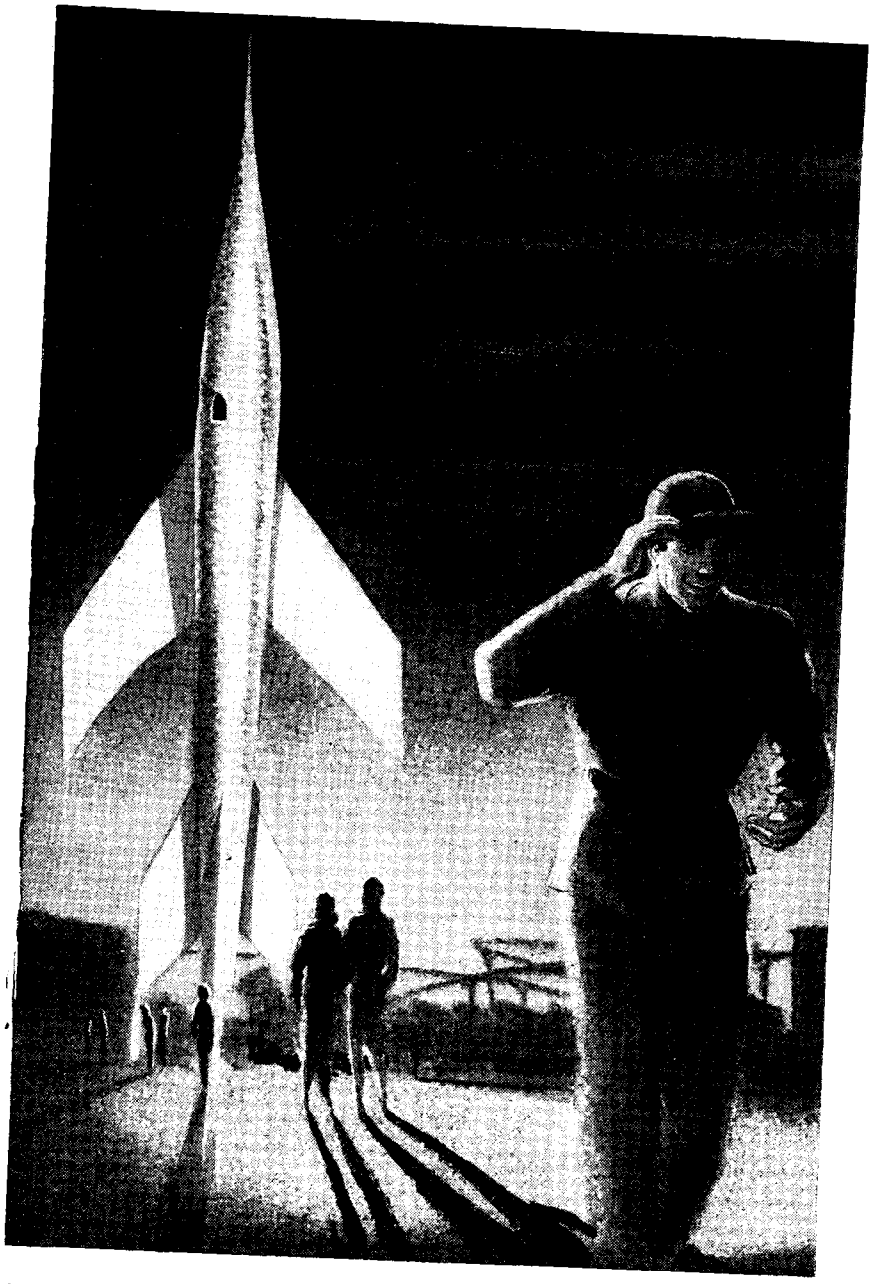

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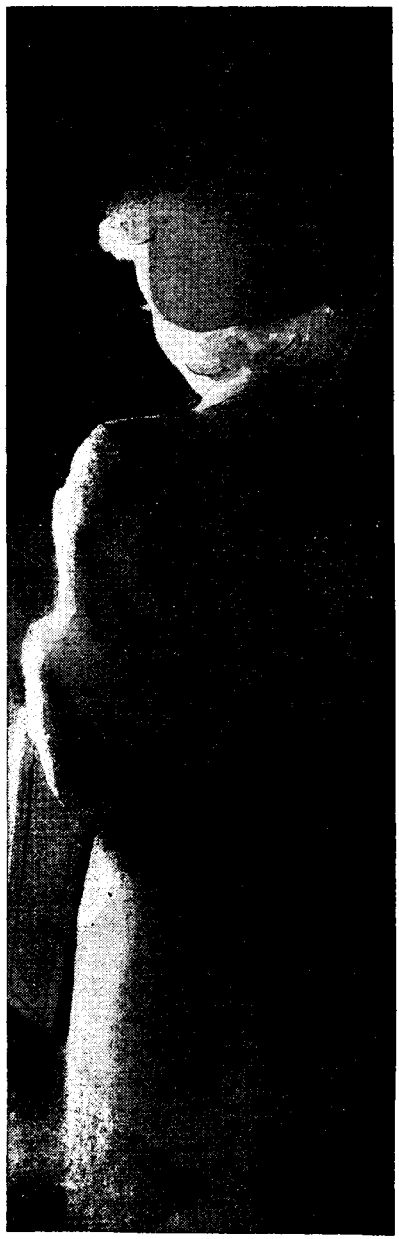

and it's almost pretty near just as good. So for us plain folks who ain't lucky enough to live up there on Venus, Cleano is the real cleaning stuff!"

Then the chorus went into their "Cleano-is-the-stuff" jingle, but Mrs. Garvy didn't hear it. She was a stubborn woman, but it occurred to her that she was very sick indeed. She didn't want to worry her husband. The next day she quietly made an appointment with her family freud.

In the waiting room she picked up a fresh new copy of *Readers Pablum* and put it down with a faint palpitation. The lead article, according to the table of contents on the cover, was titled "The Most Memorable Venusian I Ever Met."

"The freud will see you now," said the nurse, and Mrs. Garvy tottered into his office.

His traditional glasses and whiskers were reassuring. She choked out the ritual: "Freud, forgive me, for I have neuroses."

He chanted the antiphonal: "Tut, my dear girl, what seems to be the trouble?"

"I got like a hole in the head," she quavered. "I seem to forget all kinds of things. Things like everybody seems to know and I don't."

"Well, that happens to everybody occasionally, my dear. I suggest a vacation on Venus."

The freud stared, open-mouthed, at the empty chair. His nurse came in and demanded, "Hey, you see

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how she scrammed? What was the matter with *her?*"

He took off his glasses and whiskers meditatively. "You can search me. I told her she should maybe try a vacation on Venus." A momentary bafflement came into his face and he dug through his desk drawers until he found a copy of the four-color, profusely illustrated journal of his profession. It had come that morning and he had lip-read it, though looking mostly at the pictures. He leafed through to the article *Advantages of the Planet Venus in Rest Cures.*

"It's right there," he said.

The nurse looked. "It sure is," she agreed. "Why shouldn't it be?"

"The trouble with these here neurotics," decided the freud, "is that they all the time got to fight reality. Show in the next twitch."

He put on his glasses and whiskers again and forgot Mrs. Garvy and her strange behavior.

"Freud, forgive me, for I have neuroses."

"Tut, my dear girl, what seems to be the trouble?"

LIKE many cures of mental disorders, Mrs. Garvy's was achieved largely by self-treatment. She disciplined herself sternly out of the crazy notion that there had been only one rocket ship and that one a failure. She could join without wincing, eventually, in any conversation on the desirability of Venus as a place to retire, on its fabulous floral profusion. Finally she went to Venus.

All her friends were trying to book passage with the Evening Star Travel and Real Estate Corporation, but naturally the demand was crushing. She considered herself lucky to get a seat at last for the two-week summer cruise. The space ship took off from a place called Los Alamos, New Mexico. It looked just like all the spaceships on television and in the picture magazines, but was more comfortable than you would expect.

Mrs. Garvy was delighted with the fifty or so fellow-passengers assembled before takeoff. They were from all over the country and she had a distinct impression that they were on the brainy side. The captain, a tall, hawk-faced, impressive fellow named Ryan-Something or other, welcomed them aboard and trusted that their trip would be a memorable one. He regretted that there would be nothing to see because, "due to the meteorite season," the ports would be dogged down. It was disappointing, yet reassuring that the line was taking no chances.

There was the expected momentary discomfort at takeoff and then two monotonous days of droning travel through space to be whiled away in the lounge at cards or craps. The landing was a routine bump and the voyagers were issued tablets to swallow to immunize them against any minor ailments.

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When the tablets took effect, the lock was opened and Venus was theirs.

It looked much like a tropical island on Earth, except for a blanket of cloud overhead. But it had a heady, other-worldly quality that was intoxicating and glamorous.

The ten days of the vacation were suffused with a hazy magic. The soap root, as advertised, was free and sudsy. The fruits, mostly tropical varieties transplanted from Earth, were delightful. The simple shelters provided by the travel company were more than adequate for the balmy days and nights.

It was with sincere regret that the voyagers filed again into the ship, and swallowed more tablets doled out to counteract and sterilize any Venus illnesses they might unwittingly communicate to Earth.

VACATIONING was one thing. Power politics was another.

At the Pole, a small man was in a soundproof room, his face deathly pale and his body limp in a straight chair.

In the American Senate Chamber, Senator Hull-Mendoza (Synd., N. Cal.) was saying: "Mr. President and gentlemen, I would be remiss in my duty as a legislature if'n I didn't bring to the attention of the au-gust body I see here a perilous situation which is fraught with peril. As is well known to members of this au-gust body, the perfection of space flight has brought with it a situation I can only describe as fraught with peril. Mr. President and gentlemen, now that swift American rockets now traverse the trackless void of space between this planet and our nearest planetarial neighbor in space—and, gentlemen, I refer to Venus, the star of dawn, the brightest jewel in fair Vulcan's diadome—now, I say, I want to inquire what steps are being taken to colonize Venus with a vanguard of patriotic citizens like those minutemen of yore.

"Mr. President and gentlemen! There are in this world nations, envious nations—I do not name Mexico—who by fair means or foul may seek to wrest from Columbia's grasp the torch of freedom of space; nations whose low living standards and innate depravity give them an unfair advantage over the citizens of our fair republic.

"This is my program: I suggest that a city of more than 100,000 population be selected by lot. The citizens of the fortunate city are to be awarded choice lands on Venus free and clear, to have and to hold and convey to their descendants. And the national government shall provide free transportation to Venus for these citizens. And this program shall continue, city by city, until there has been deposited on Venus a sufficient vanguard of citizens to protect our manifest rights in that planet.

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"Objections will be raised, for carping critics we have always with us. They will say there isn't enough steel. They will call it a cheap giveaway. I say there *is* enough steel for *one* city's population to be transferred to Venus, and that is all that is needed. For when the time comes for the second city to be transferred, the first, emptied city can be wrecked for the needed steel! And is it a giveaway? Yes! It is the most glorious giveaway in the history of mankind! Mr. President and gentlemen, there is no time to waste—Venus must be American!"

BLACK-KUPPERMAN, at the Pole, opened his eyes and said feebly, "The style was a little uneven. Do you think anybody'll notice?"

"You did fine, boy; just fine," Barlow reassured him.

Hull-Mendoza's bill became law.

Drafting machines at the South Pole were busy around the clock and the Pittsburgh steel mills spewed millions of plates into the Los Alamos spaceport of the Evening Star Travel and Real Estate Corporation. It was going to be Los Angeles, for logistic reasons, and the three most accomplished psycho-kineticists went to Washington and mingled in the crowd at the drawing to make certain that the Los Angeles capsule slithered into the fingers of the blindfolded Senator.

Los Angeles loved the idea and a forest of spaceships began to blossom in the desert. They weren't very good space ships, but they didn't have to be.

A team at the Pole worked at Barlow's direction on a mail setup. There would have to be letters to and from Venus to keep the slightest taint of suspicion from arising. Luckily Barlow remembered that the problem had been solved once before—by Hitler. Relatives of persons incinerated in the furnaces of Lublin or Majdanek continued to get cheery postal cards.

THE Los Angeles flight went off on schedule, under tremendous press, newsreel and television coverage. The world cheered the gallant Angelenos who were setting off on their patriotic voyage to the land of milk and honey. The forest of spaceships thundered up, and up, and out of sight without untoward incident. Billions envied the Angelenos, cramped and on short rations though they were.

Wreckers from San Francisco, whose capsule came up second, moved immediately into the city of the angels for the scrap steel their own flight would require. Senator Hull-Mendoza's constituents could do no less.

The president of Mexico, hypnotically alarmed at this extension of *yanqui imperialismo* beyond the stratosphere, launched his own Venus-colony program.

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Across the water it was England versus Ireland, France versus Germany, China versus Russia, India versus Indonesia. Ancient hatreds grew into the flames that were rocket ships assailing the air by hundreds daily.

Dear Ed, how are you? Sam and I are fine and hope you are fine. Is it nice up there like they say with food and close grone on trees? I drove by Springfield yesterday and it sure looked funny all the buildings down but of coarse it is worth it we have to keep the greasers in their place. Do you have any truble with them on Venus? Drop me a line some time. Your loving sister, Alma.

Dear Alma, I am fine and hope you are fine. It is a fine place here fine climate and easy living. The doctor told me today that I seem to be ten years younger. He thinks there is something in the air here keeps people young. We do not have much trouble with the greasers here they keep to theirselves it is just a question of us outnumbering them and staking out the best places for the Americans. In South Bay I know a nice little island that I have been saving for you and Sam with lots of blanket trees and ham bushes. Hoping to see you and Sam soon, your loving brother, Ed.

Sam and Alma were on their way shortly.

Poprob got a dividend in every nation after the emigration had passed the halfway mark. The lonesome stay-at-homes were unable to bear the melancholy of a low population density; their conditioning had been to swarms of their kin. After that point it was possible to foist off the crudest stripped-down accommodations on would-be emigrants; they didn't care.

Black-Kupperman did a final job on President Hull-Mendoza, the last job that genius of hypnotics would ever do on any moron, important or otherwise.

Hull-Mendoza, panic-stricken by his presidency over an emptying nation, joined his constituents. The *Independence,* aboard which traveled the national government of America, was the most elaborate of all the spaceships—bigger, more comfortable, with a lounge that was handsome, though cramped, and cloakrooms for Senators and Representatives. It went, however, to the same place as the others and Black-Kupperman killed himself, leaving a note that stated he "couldn't live with my conscience."

THE day after the American President departed, Barlow flew into a rage. Across his specially

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built desk were supposed to flow all Poprob high-level documents and this thing—this outrageous thing—called Poprob*term* apparently had got into the executive stage before he had even had a glimpse of it!

He buzzed for Rogge-Smith, his statistician. Rogge-Smith seemed to be at the bottom of it. Poprobterm seemed to be about first and second and third derivatives, whatever they were. Barlow had a deep distrust of anything more complex than what he called an "average."

While Rogge-Smith was still at the door, Barlow snapped, "What's the meaning of this? Why haven't I been consulted? How far have you people got and why have you been working on something I haven't authorized?"

"Didn't want to bother you, Chief," said Rogge-Smith. "It was really a technical matter, kind of a final cleanup. Want to come and see the work?"

Mollified, Barlow followed his statistician down the corridor.

"You still shouldn't have gone ahead without my okay," he grumbled. "Where the hell would you people have been without me?"

"That's right, Chief. We couldn't have swung it ourselves; our minds just don't work that way. And all that stuff you knew from Hitler—it wouldn't have occurred to us. Like poor Black-Kupperman."

They were in a fair-sized machine shop at the end of a slight upward incline. It was cold. Rogge-Smith pushed a button that started a motor, and a flood of arctic light poured in as the roof parted slowly. It showed a small spaceship with the door open.

BARLOW gaped as Rogge-Smith took him by the elbow and his other boys appeared: Swenson-Swenson, the engineer; Tsutsugimushi-Duncan, his propellants man; Kalb-French, advertising.

"In you go, Chief," said Tsutsugimushi-Duncan. "This is Poprobterm."

"But I'm the world Dictator!"

"You bet, Chief. You'll be in history, all right—but this is necessary, I'm afraid."

The door was closed. Acceleration slammed Barlow cruelly to the metal floor. Something broke and warm, wet stuff, salty-tasting, ran from his mouth to his chin. Arctic sunlight through a port suddenly became a fierce lancet stabbing at his eyes; he was out of the atmosphere.

Lying twisted and broken under the acceleration, Barlow realized that some things had not changed, that Jack Ketch was never asked to dinner however many shillings you paid him to do your dirty work, that murder will out, that crime pays only temporarily.

The last thing he learned was that death is the end of pain.

—C. M. KORNBLUTH

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